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The Religion of the Book of Esther

Michael V. Fox

Another Example of "Minhag America"

Marc Shapiro

The Molten Calf: Judgment, Motive and Meaning

David E. Fass

Good-Bye, Father: A Journey to the USSR

Leonard Grob

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JUDAISM

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

Readers of JUDAISM must be aware by now that Dr. Robert Gordis has been incapacitated for some time and has not been able to resume his editorial functions. As of this issue, therefore, Dr. Gordis is becoming Editor Emeritus and Dr. Ruth B. Waxman has been appointed Acting Editor.

We salute Dr. Gordis for the intellectual and spiritual greatness and the continuity that he has provided to JUDAISM virtually throughout its entire existence. He was one of its founders in 1952, and the first Editor. In 1970 he returned in that capacity and, for almost two decades, his scholarship and creativity have maintained JUDAISM at its unremittingly high level.

In honor of Dr. Gordis we plan to issue a *Festschrift* in the next year, and admirers of his are invited to contribute papers for it.

* * *

God and the Megillah

The opening sentences of *Michael V. Fox's* article would seem to contradict the title, "The Religion of the Book of Esther." They read as follows: "God is not in the book of Esther. He does not appear in the story, nor is He referred to, not even by circumlocution." How can there have been a religious text without God? The author offers an analysis of different explanations, including his own ingenious and very satisfying one.

Custom Can Prevail Over Law

The inspiration to write articles arises in many diverse ways. One of the most flattering is to be found in "Another Example of 'Minhag America'." Its author, *Marc Shapiro*, was moved to write it after reading Robert Gordis' "Seating in the Synagogue: 'Minhag America'," which appeared several years ago. Both authors point out that custom sometimes does overtake and change law. Dr. Gordis wrote about mixed pews, while Mr. Shapiro writes about the practice of women uncovering their hair. This is not merely a matter of fashion, but of whether one may pray in the presence of such uncovered hair. The arguments, pro and con, are many and interesting.

How To Study Kabbala

When interest in the Kabbala became widespread in the sixteenth century, it was necessary to train people in the proper way to study it, since it was esoteric lore and certainly not for any casual reader. To solve the problem, Moses Cordovero wrote *Or Ne'erav* as a manual. The ideal student, he says, is at least twenty years old and should already have mastered the classic Jewish texts. The ideal teacher is one who knows the classic texts but has mastered Kabbala for its own sake. The best times for study are also indicated. *Ira Robinson's* "Moses Cordovero and Kabbalistic Education in the Sixteenth Century" reveals a highly unusual "how to" book.

Leo Baeck

Most people think of the late Rabbi Leo Baeck as an exemplar of Reform Judaism who comported himself with great heroism during the Nazi years. What they do not know, however, is that this Reform rabbi, who started out as a rationalist, became, in his later years, intensely interested in mysticism, particularly in that which distinguished Jewish mysticism from all other similar manifestations. At the same time, he had a great love for halakhah, and managed to balance all of these seemingly disparate qualities. *Zvi Kurzweil*, the author of "The Relevance of Leo Baeck's Thought to Mainstream Judaism," concludes his paper with the hope that Baeck's example may help "counteract . . . present religious extremism . . . and underscore the need for an enlightened integration of the Jewish faith commensurate with traditional principles."

When Moses Was Away

The backslidings in Jewish history began very early on. Shortly after the Exodus from Egypt and the Revelation on Mt. Sinai we discover the people of Israel making the Golden Calf. How do you account for such a fall from glory? Through the generations commentators have been busy explaining, accusing, excusing, and analyzing this event in Jewish history. *David Fass* gives us an overview of them and then adds his own interpretation in "The Molten Calf: Judgment, Motive, and Meaning."

There Is A Unity in Judaism

Faith and works, prophet and priest, are standard pairs of opposites in general religious thinking. However, they are not opposites in Judaism. Faith without works or works without faith are unacceptable in the Jewish religious pattern; the two must go together. Neither is there a dichotomy between prophet and priest. The prophets who preached ethical behavior also preached that proper religious practice, under priestly supervision, was what God expected of humans. *Jakob J. Petuchowski* offers a tren-

chant analysis of the question in "Faith and Works in the Biblical Confrontation of Prophets and Priests."

Proofs of Identity

Who are you and how do you know who you are? Are you Jewish, and on what basis do you say so? The question seems like a contemporary one, courtesy of the recurrent debate in Israel on "Who is a Jew?", but *Martin Goodman*, in "Identity and Authority in Ancient Judaism," points out that the question goes back to antiquity, when there were five ways of establishing one's Jewishness, some of them imposed by the state. Somehow, the integrity and continuity of the Jewish people survived, which may provide a lesson for today.

The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Adult Education

Talmud Torah keneged kulam, the study of Torah rates as the highest of the religious virtues. That idea must have been in Franz Rosenzweig's mind when he established the first *Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt in 1920. It was a place for ongoing adult study where, it was hoped, both teacher and student would be mutually instructive and instructed. Contemporary university departments of continuing education and the adult education programs which proliferate in our day are unwitting testimony to Rosenzweig's example and the continued relevance of his program.

The Frankfurt *Lehrhaus* flourished until Hitler came to power, and it had a short renewal, oppression notwithstanding, under Buber's supervision. However, the Nazis' heavy hand eventually put an end to it. A new *Lehrhaus* was established in 1982 and the author of this paper, *Brigitte Kern-Ulmer* was one of those involved in that venture. Her paper is entitled "Franz Rosenzweig's *Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt: A Model of Jewish Adult Education."

Can We Believe the Bible?

In George S. Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, there is a charming song whose refrain is, "It says in the Bible / But that ain't reliable / It ain't necessarily so." Seriously speaking, is it so or isn't it? Is everything in the Bible literally true? Must we take the narrative and the seemingly supernatural portions with a grain of salt or should we read them as fiction? Should we combine all three approaches? Even the classic Jewish commentators do not always agree.

In "Faith, Fiction and the Jewish Scriptures," *Berel Dov Lerner* presents an argument for accepting on faith that the Bible "is so."

"Am Yisrael Hai"

Emil Fackenheim, certainly one of the distinguished philosophers of our day, manifests a strong religious approach in his thinking. In "The Theo-Political Thought of Emil Fackenheim," *Harvey Shulman* carefully analyzes one aspect of it — the close relationship involving the Jewish people and the State of Israel, both firmly founded in the Jewish religion. Fackenheim does not make denominational distinctions; he thinks in terms of "all Jews." In these post-Holocaust days, he maintains that it is especially vital for all Jews to strive towards the continuity of this unity.

A Successful Search for Roots

The parameters of this journal, as indicated in the Statement of Sponsorship, are the "creative discussion and exposition of the religious, moral and philosophical concepts of Judaism and their relevance to the problems of modern society." We believe that the paper by *Leonard Grob*, "Goodbye, Father: A Journey To The USSR," fits right in as being highly relevant to our world. The author went to find the sources of his father's being and, essentially, to make peace with himself. Our readers will find it to be a very moving statement.

R.B.W.

We deeply mourn the passing of a former editor of JUDAISM

STEVEN S. SCHWARZSCHILD ז"ל

and

of a member of the Board of Contributing Editors

NAHUM N. GLATZER ז"ל

יהי זכרונם ברוך

The Religion of the Book of Esther

MICHAEL V. FOX

GOD IS NOT IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER. HE does not appear in the story, nor is He referred to, not even by circumlocution. Godot would not be considered present in Beckett's play, although he is mentioned in it. Yet neither God nor Godot is simply absent. Somehow, their non-presence itself interposes them in the story, though, of course, in different ways. Godot is often spoken about but certainly does not come; his *not coming* is of highest importance and calls for interpretation. God is not mentioned in Esther yet *might* be there from start to end. It is this "might be" that is so problematic, yet it should not be reduced to a comfortable "is" or "is not." The *possibility* of the Divine presence calls for explanation.

God *should* be in, or at least manifestly near, a story of Israel's salvation. We expect Him to hear prayer, influence people, guide events, guarantee national salvation and, finally, receive thanks. Yet He is not said to do any of these things in the Esther story. Such a violation of expectations is surely no accident. What does this silence say about the book's message? Where is God?

1. God's absence

Many scholars, all of them modern, assert that the book is "secular," meaning that God plays no role in the events. According to one formulation, the book narrates "an entirely profane story in a purely worldly sense for the sake of satisfying worldly passions and instincts."¹ Since most of these scholars are theologians, they tend to view this apparent secularity as a moral failing.

The Scroll's alleged secularity is commonly, and strangely, thought to be an expression of Jewish nationalism. B. Anderson believes that Esther is "a witness to the fact that Israel, in pride, either made nationalism a religion in complete indifference to God or presumptuously identified God's historical purpose with the preservation and glorification of the Jewish people."² R. Pfeifer asserts that "secular nationalism" is the book's guiding light: the author considered religion a

1. C. H. Cornill, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Leipzig, 1891), p. 153.

2. "The Place of the Book of Esther in the Christian Bible," *Journal of Religion* 30 (1950): 40.

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garment to be lightly discarded whenever it hindered worldly aims.³ But a nationalism that is secular on principle never existed in the ancient world (and probably not before the late eighteenth century CE); it is unlikely that such an attitude would have been comprehensible in the ancient world. If the Scroll is, indeed, “secular,” that cannot be because of nationalistic influences. In any case, nationalism, in its ancient forms⁴ and most of its modern ones, never hesitated to invoke and to claim divine support for its plans. Nothing in Biblical religion could hamper nationalist aspirations — certainly not the aspirations of the Jewish nation in Esther — which are simply to stay alive.⁵

G. Gerleman⁶ argues that the book of Esther is patterned after the Exodus story, but is “detheologized” and “desacralized.” In both the Succession Narrative (2 Samuel 9-20) and Esther, events are described in accordance with their inner-historical causality. But, Gerleman believes, whereas in the former God works within the human heart, in Esther “even that final remnant is lost.”⁷ Gerleman calls Esther a “theologically coded document,”⁸ but does not inform us what the code is or how to read it.

S. Talmon, too, deems the Scroll secular and explains this as a characteristic of its literary genre, which he identifies as a historicized Wisdom tale. “The concept of an unspecified and remote deity devoid of any individual character as is prevalent in the Esther-narrative, is present also in some specimens of biblical wisdom literature.”⁹ But the comparison helps little, for, whereas God is indeed “unspecified” in Esther, that is hardly the case in Wisdom Literature, in which he appears

3. *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York, 1952), p. 742ff. Pfeiffer associates this “secular nationalism” with John Hyrcanus. But Hyrcanus is a strange candidate for secularity. He took on messianic features and was high priest (Josephus, *Wars* I, 68-69); Josephus even attributes to him the gift of prophecy. His religious authority was recognized by the Pharisees in the early part of his reign, and certain cultic ordinances were attributed to him (Mishnah *Sotah* 9:10). His forcible conversion of the Idumeans shows that his nationalistic policies were not devoid of religious ideology. Nor would any other of the Hasmonean kings, whatever their personal moral qualities, have considered themselves “secular.”

4. Though nationalism is a product of eighteenth-century Western Europe, it has antecedents in the Hellenistic world, where nations (*ethnoi*) were forced to define themselves against the background of the sovereign kingdoms.

5. As Jon Levenson puts it in “The Scroll of Esther in Ecumenical Perspective,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 13 (1976): 442:

If that particularism is a stumbling-block to us, there is hardly a book in the Hebrew Bible over which we shall not trip. . . . It is clear that if universalism is our theological goal, our problems do not begin with Esther.

Perhaps the theologians would have been less exercised by the book’s nationalism if the people were called “Israelites” rather than “Jews.”

6. *Esther* (*Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament* XXI, 1982), p. 43

7. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

8. *Ibid.*

9. “‘Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther,” *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 430

frequently and prominently. The fact adduced by Talmon,¹⁰ that in Qohelet, and most of Job, God is referred to by “non-specific” appellations (such as “God” and “Shaddai”), serves only to distance Esther from Wisdom Literature, for God does not receive these designations in Esther. In fact, all of Wisdom Literature insists on God’s constant and universal presence in human life. The Deity may seem to lack “individual character” in Wisdom Literature, but He cannot be said to do so in Esther, in which He does not even appear.

2. *God’s presence*

The great majority of commentators consider the book “religious,” meaning that it teaches, or at least assumes, that God is active in the events that it narrates. They often “defend” the book’s religiosity against its detractors, as if religiosity were a virtue in itself.¹¹

Traditional readers never doubted that it was God guaranteeing Israel’s existence and shaping its salvation in Esther’s time as always. The absence of God’s name was just a curiosity; it evoked explanations but was of no more intrinsic significance than the similar absence in, say, Genesis 37.¹² Since they were reading Esther as one segment of a larger text, the Hebrew Bible, they were right in their own terms. Meaning depends on context, and, in the context of the canon, both Jewish and Christian, the Scroll is part of a larger testimony to God’s control of history.

But Esther was not written as part of the Bible. Not only could the author not have known that there would be a Bible, but the lack of reference to God may show that he did not intend his book to be regarded as sacred scripture. If, then, we seek to interpret the author’s intention, regarding that as the source and determinant of its primary (though not sole) meaning, we must try to read the book as an independent unit, unconstrained by the canonical contexts that it was later to enter. That context can elucidate the authorial meaning of Esther by providing material for comparison and showing something about

10. Ibid.

11. The history of the debate is chronicled in Wolfram Herrmann’s *Ester im Streit der Meinungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), esp. pp. 25, 37-47.

12. The classical midrashim (including B. *Megillah* 10b-17a and *Targum Sheni*) as well as most of the medieval commentators, do not touch upon the problem, but simply assume God’s omnipresence and guidance of history. Some saw a reference to God in some of the occurrences of the word “king” (e.g., B. *Megillah* 15b, on Esther 6:1). Nor is the identification of “another place” (4:14) with God the prevalent common notion (see note 19). *Targum Rishon* (unlike *Targum Sheni*) seems to make the identification, but only implicitly. Ibn Ezra in his second commentary on Esther, citing Saadia, repudiates that identification and offers his own reason for the silence: Mordecai sent copies of his scroll throughout the world and these were incorporated in the Persian chronicles. He omitted God’s name because he was worried that the heathen would substitute the name of their god for it.

the author's background, but it cannot *determine* its meaning, for any book can diverge from its tradition as well as draw upon it.

For most commentators, it seems, the silence about God speaks clearly of God. H. Fisch, for example, calls the silence eloquent and quickly translates it into theology:

In the end there is only one ruler whose commands, never officially promulgated, are unchanging and whose will prevails. He lurks behind the costly hangings of the court and whispers in the ear of Ahasuerus in the night. It is of him that the subtext speaks and whose deeds it records.¹³

But Fisch, straining to hear through and beyond the silence, is projecting his own faith and ignoring the stillness itself.

The commentators who believe that God is hidden in the book of Esther do not think that He is very well hidden, for they have no doubts that the author had not doubts that God is nigh. But if He is so clearly on the scene, why is He not mentioned? L. B. Paton¹⁴ suggests that God's name is avoided to prevent its profanation during the carnival-like festivities of Purim. Similarly, E. Greenstein says that the "frivolous" nature of the Purim festival was no time to pronounce the sacred name.¹⁵ But Purim celebrants, even if they become tipsy, are unlikely to blaspheme, and if they were to do so, the presence of God's name in the Scroll (which is read aloud by a lector, who would not be drunk) would not have conduced to it. Moreover, the festivities *follow* the lection. The Septuagint Esther shows no hesitation about referring to God, and Jewish liturgy introduces and concludes the reading of the Scroll with blessings which use God's name; and, certainly, later generations were no less scrupulous about blasphemy than was the author of the Masoretic text (MT) of Esther. In any case, it is not only the Divine name (YHWH) that is avoided in MT-Esther; neither is there any reference to God by epithet or circumlocution.¹⁶

According to Clines, we do not need a particular "historical" reason for the non-mention of God.¹⁷ He argues that there were versions of the story *prior* to the Masoretic text that said little (but were not silent) about the Divine causality of the coincidences. The author of the Masoretic Esther tale simply pushed the tendency further.¹⁸ But if Clines

13. *Poetry With a Purpose* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1988), p. 14.

14. *Esther* (International Critical Commentary, 1909), p. 95.

15. Edward L. Greenstein, "A Jewish Reading of Esther," In *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. by J. Neusner *et al.* (Philadelphia, 1987).

16. A.W. Streane, *The Book of Esther* [Cambridge Bible, 1922], p. xvi, observes that I Maccabees, too, avoids God's name. That book, however, refers to God by epithets such as "heaven" or simply by a pronoun.

17. *The Esther Scroll* (Sheffield, 1984), p. 153.

18. Clines finds two "sources" intertwined in the present book of Esther—a Mordecai source and an Esther source, each originally an independent tale (pp. 115-38). Neither said much about God. Clines (following Torrey and Moore) also argues that it is possible to extract an earlier layer from a variant Greek version known as the Alpha Text. That

is right in his historical reconstruction, and there were a few references to God in the earlier form of the story (preserved by the original Alpha Text), we must ask why the MT author chose to eliminate them instead of adding to them. To remove God from a story is a deliberate, significant act, and cannot be taken for granted.

Four types of evidence have been adduced to demonstrate God's presence and activity in the Esther story.

a. Allusions

Various phrases and statements have been read as allusions to God. The phrase "another place" was traditionally interpreted as a locution for God; but that is certainly incorrect.¹⁹ More pertinent are the following: Both Mordecai (4:14) and Haman's associates (6:13) assert that the Jews will endure and prevail, but they do not indicate just what force ensures their victory. The Jews fast and cry out — actions whose only function can be to appeal to God's mercy. Especially 4:14, where Esther asks that the Jews fast "for me," implies an act that is not only an expression of grief but an attempt to achieve something, and fasting can achieve something external to the faster only by influencing God.²⁰ The indefinite expression "things were turned about," lit. "it was reversed" (9:1), may hint at someone — i.e., God — causing the reversal. The Jews rejoice after the victory and decide to observe the festival annually, and such festivities are, by their nature, intended to give thanks to God.

These hints are, indeed, significant, but hints are all they are. The author avoids mention of God even when that is most natural. This avoidance is as important as the affirmations which it skirts.

b. Coincidences

The most common argument for the religiosity of the book, one made in different ways and with different emphases, is that the *coincidences* reported are so unlikely that they cannot be mere chance; hence

earlier layer, the "proto-AT," is a translation from a Hebrew text that, Clines says (pp. 107-12), did refer to God in a few places (for example, in iv 7 [corresponding to MT 3:7] Mordecai tells Esther, "after calling upon God, to speak to the king concerning us, and deliver us from death"). Such references, he believes, were removed by the author of the MT.

19. Mordecai's warning to Esther that, if she fails to act, salvation will come to the Jews from *makom aher*, "another place," does not, contrary to one ancient interpretation, refer to God. The use of *Ha-Makom*, "the Place", in rabbinic Hebrew as a designation of God is not comparable. In rabbinic Hebrew, God is called "the Place" because (according to the most likely explanation) he is the place in which the world exists (Gen. Rab. §68). God is *the Place* par excellence (always with the article), and it would make no sense to call him "another place." In any case, if God is *another place*, then Esther is herself "a place," meaning that they are on the same plane as two loci of salvation, and this is hardly conceivable. "Another place" must be simply another human as a source of deliverance.

20. Observed by J. A. Loader, in "Esther as a Novel with Different Levels of Meaning," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 90 (1978): 418 [hereafter, ZAW].

the author must (it is assumed) believed that it was God who brought them to pass. These coincidences include the timely vacancy of the queenship at the Persian court, the opportune accession of a Jew to queenship, Mordecai's discovery of the eunuchs' plot, Esther's favorable reception by the king, the king's insomnia, Haman's early arrival at the palace, and Haman's reckless plea for mercy at Esther's feet.²¹ E. Segal finds the key to the Scroll's religion in the motif of *anger*: Haman's wrath, Xerxes' anger at Vashti and his calming down, the anger of Bigtan and Teresh, the king's anger at Haman — and even the absence of anger on the part of the king when Esther enters the throne room.²² Segal sees this motif as evidence for "a firm theological conviction that God, while generally allowing the events to take a natural course, is also assumed to be tweaking at the strings at strategic moments in order to ensure that justice will ultimately prevail."²³ Clines says that, *taken together*, the chance occurrences have a cumulative effect and show the guiding hand of God. "To the religious believer, 'chance' is a name for God."²⁴ According to Clines, Divine control of events is not "hidden" or "veiled"; it is stated indirectly but unambiguously, primarily by means of the coincidences.

It is, however, difficult to imagine a better veil than silence. If God is present in Esther, He is certainly well-hidden. It may be true for some believers that chance means Divine governance, but can we assume that the author is one of these? Perhaps it is only the *interpreters* for whom the story's coincidences declare God's work. Numerous stories shamelessly heap up improbable coincidences without investing them with theological significance — *As You Like It*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *Bleak House*, for example. Moreover, the coincidences in Esther are not so far-fetched as to be incredible as natural occurrences. The least likely event among them is the king's fortuitous insomnia together with the reading of the annals that chances upon the right passage about how Mordecai had once — without reward — saved the king; but that coincidence was not necessary for the Jews' salvation. As for the motif of anger — this is no more a pointer to Divine intervention than any other event or emotion in the story (love, pride, arrogance, the desire to be loved, and so on). Anger could serve this function only if it were made to do so, for it is a common human emotion not generally thought to be caused by God. If anger, in itself, proved God's

21. These coincidences are interpreted as evidence of God's activity by D. J. A. Clines (*The Esther Scroll*, pp. 153-158), among others.

22. Eliezer Segal, "Human Anger and Divine Intervention in Esther," *Prooftexts* 9 (1989): 247-56.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 153. W. B. Beet ("The Message of the Book of Esther," *Expositor* 22 (1921): 291-300) also argues that the element of chance disappears as the coincidences reinforce one another.

involvement, then Haman's wrath, too, would be God's doing — but to what end?

It may be very unlikely that any particular one of these events would occur, but it is actually likely that some improbable events would occur, as they do every day, and it is not unlikely that some such coincidences would provide opportunities for alert people to exploit. Even though the author of Esther might be expected to interpret the coincidences as God's doing — many commentators clearly expect this — he *does not* do so. Rather than making coincidences into comforting signs of Divine control, he musters them as evidence of almost the opposite: the unpredictability of the choices that an erratic reality forces upon people. He thereby shows the need for alert and courageous Jews to deal with the constraints of an unpredictable reality.

In an often-mentioned variant of the above argument, A. Cohen²⁵ finds a clue to the book's religion in the *pur*, the lot that Haman casts. The *pur*, he says, is a symbol of chance-fate. The lottery is Haman's way of demonstrating to the Jews that he can deal with their fate by chance alone. "Haman denies both the possibility and the reality of the Divine."²⁶ Haman's defeat is thus evidence of God's providence. But fate is the *opposite* of chance—it is its negation, not the obverse side of the same coin. And the casting of lots in the ancient world (unlike in a modern lottery) had nothing to do with chance; it was a means of divination, and it presumed Divine control of events. When, for example, Samuel casts lots to select a king (1 Sam. 10:19-24), it is in order to determine whom God wants to appoint (vs. 24), not to choose a lucky winner.²⁷ There is nothing to suggest that Haman's lots had a fundamentally different purpose from everywhere else. Haman was consulting his gods, as the Greek Alpha Text recognizes.²⁸

25. "Hu Ha-goral": The Religious Significance of Esther," JUDAISM 23 (1974): 87-94.

26. Ibid., p. 89.

27. The Bible has many examples of lotteries used to inquire of Divinity; for example 1 Sam. 14:41ff.; 1 Chr. 24-26; Neh. 11:1; Josh. 7:10-26; and see Prov. 16:33. Nowhere does an Israelite author ascribe a different purpose to foreigners' lots. The sailors on Jonah's ship cast lots as a way of asking their gods who was responsible for the storm (Jon.1:7). On the meaning of lots see *Ency. Judaica* XI, pp. 510-13. Lotteries had exactly the same purpose in Babylonia — and the Babylonian word for "lots"—*purû*—is the origin of the word Purim (J. Lewy, "Old Assyrian *purû*um and *pû rum*," *Revue Hittite et Asiatique* 5 (1939): 117-24. On the use of lots in Babylonia, see A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago 1964), p. 208ff.

28. The Alpha Text is a highly variant Greek version of the Esther story. It is composed of an original story interlaced with later supplements taken from the Septuagint. The original story is based on a Hebrew version independent of the MT; see Clines *The Esther Scroll* (chap. 7) and my forthcoming book, *The Redaction of the Books of Esther* (Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series). The original Alpha Text (and, in my view, the MT) probably reflects a later environment than Achemenid Persia, but the purpose of lots was constant throughout the ancient Near East, and the interpretation of their function in the Alpha Text is correct.

c. Reversals

The core of the story is organized into a series of theses and antitheses—events and their reversals—using the same or similar language. For example:

(3:10) And the king took
his signet ring off his finger

and gave it to
Haman son of Hammedatha,
the Agagite, persecutor
of the Jews.

(8:2) And the king took
off his signet ring,
which he had taken from Haman,
and gave it to
Mordecai.

Likewise, Mordecai's decree (8:9-13) reverses Haman's (3:12-14) in language as well as content.

The book of Esther is structured on the principle of *peripety* — unexpected reversal of human expectations. This is explicit in 9:1: matters were “turned about” for the Jews. In several psalms and proverbs,²⁹ *peripety* is understood as a manifestation of God's control. In an earlier study, I suggested that the theology of Esther is implied in the structure of reversals.³⁰ The frustration of human expectations in an orderly, symmetrical fashion — a 180-degree reversal rather than a mere break-down — portrays (but does not prove) the working of a transcendental force beyond human control and prediction. Similarly, J. A. Loader asserts that the reversal of relations — the “x-pattern of power relations” — reflects Divine intervention.³¹ The “deepest” level of the book, according to Loader, is the deliberate “veiling” of God.³²

But like coincidence, *peripety*, in and of itself, is never used as an *argument* for God's control, but, rather, expresses confidence that God's justice will prevail.³³ Elsewhere in the Bible, when *peripety* is intended to manifest God's power, it is *said* to do so. The author of Esther could not expect his audience to deduce God's presence from *peripety* alone. If *peripety* is the shape of justice in earlier texts, in Esther it is as if the shape remains without the reality which took on that form. Or as Loader, intending the opposite, puts it, the reversals show “the *deus ex machina* without the *deus*.”³⁴

29. E.g., Ps. 7:11-14; 35:7-9; 37:14-15; 54:6-7; 57:7; 141:9-10; Prov. 1:16-19; 24:12; Job 5:13; Jer. 30:16; Isa. 14:2; Ezek. 17:24.

30. M. V. Fox, “The Structure of the Book of Esther,” *Isaac L. Seeligmann Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 291-304, q.v. for a listing of the theses and antitheses.

31. “Esther as a Novel with Different Levels of Meaning,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 90 (1978): 417-21. Loader claims that stylistic chiasms also show the thematic reversal; for examples, the words “enemies” and “Jews” are reiterated by synonyms in reverse order, i.e., “Jews” — “those who hate them” in 9:1 (p. 419).

32. *Ibid.*, p. 421.

33. Sandra B. Berg, *The Book of Esther* (Society for Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 44, 1979), p. 112.

34. “Esther as a Novel,” p. 419.

A. Meinhold argues that the author wants to emphasize the responsibility of individual Jews, and does not want to have God pre-empting human action. Hence, he keeps Divinity at the margins, but definitely present, waiting to act if men fail.³⁵ Similarly, S. Berg³⁶ maintains that the Scroll refrains from any reference to Deity in order to accentuate the role of human responsibility in shaping history, and also to teach the hiddenness of God's control. But you cannot teach that something is hidden merely by hiding it. If you hide it too well, no one knows that it is there. The point of teaching that God is hidden would be to teach that he is actually present, in other words, not *really* hidden. To do so, one must show people how to read God's presence in events. This is done often in the Bible. For example, Joseph tells his brothers, "You planned evil against me but God planned it for the best, so as to achieve, as is now the case, the preservation of many people" (Gen. 50:20). Likewise: "But [Samson's] father and his mother did not know that it [i.e. his request to marry a Philistine woman] was from the Lord, for he was seeking a pretext against the Philistines" (Judg. 14:4). Or an author may say simply "and the Lord loved him [i.e. Solomon]" (2 Sam. 12:24) or "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was successful ... (Gen. 39:2), thereby reminding us that their success was not the reward of human wisdom alone. If that is the point of the author of Esther, he certainly fails to make it.

d. Themes

Some scholars argue that the story's themes, in and of themselves, are religious statements. According to Meinhold, the story's central concern, the preservation of the Jewish people, is inherently a religious one, for they are the people of God's covenant. The book identifies the survival of the Jews with God's will and, by revealing the flaws of the Jewish protagonists, it shows that the Jews were chosen not because of any superiority on their part but out of God's free grace.³⁷ A. LaCoque says that the conflict between the Jews and Amalek adumbrates the "Holy War", and that the course of events is patterned after the "Salvation History".³⁸ Hence, Esther is a "religious book in non-religious language."³⁹

35. "Theologische Erwägungen zum Buch Esther," ZAW 34 (1978): 91 f.; idem., *Das Buch Esther* (Zürcher Bibelkommentare, 1983): 99-101.

36. *Book of Esther*, pp. 178-79.

37. *Esther*, 101.

38. A. LaCoque, "Haman in the Book of Esther," *Hebrew Annual Review* 11 (1987), pp. 207-22. The "Holy War" comprised the wars of the Exodus period and the conquest of Canaan — "holy" because it was, in theory, conducted by God himself. For a survey of the treatment of this subject and a new synthesis see Millard Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1980). For objections to the concept of "holy war" see Peter Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978). "Salvation History" refers to the history of God's saving acts on Israel's behalf, in particular in the period from the Patriarchs to the Settlement.

39. Meinhold, *Esther*, pp. 99-101.

As in the case of coincidences and reversals, the themes surrounding Israel's deliverance can be, and usually are, used in the context of religious concerns. But that does not decide the issue of whether in Esther they have been deliberately dislodged from that context. The Scroll is undoubtedly peculiar in avoiding mention of God; it may be peculiar in its theology as well.

3. *The Message of silence*

The attention that the Scroll's readers have given to its silence about God shows that the silence speaks louder than a whole string of pious prayers and protestations. But what does it say?

a. What is (almost) said about God

Commentators (and other careful readers) have weighed the evidence and decided for one option or the other: either the story is "secular" or it is "religious." I, myself, have gone back and forth; I am not even persuaded by my own earlier attempt⁴⁰ to tilt the balance in one direction. Let us consider again just how religion comes into (but not all the way into) the book.

Although Mordecai avoids referring to God, his confidence that salvation *will* arise for the Jews has theological implications: "For if you are silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another source [lit., 'place']" (4:14a). Such confidence usually derives from and expresses a belief in God's covenantal care for Israel. But it might also assert Jewry's inner strength and potential for self-help. The words of 1 Sam. 15:29, *nezaḥ Yisrael lo yeshaker*, is a popular Zionist motto. When spoken by religious Jews it means "The Eternal One of Israel will not deceive";⁴¹ when used by non-religious Jews it implies, "The eternity of Israel will not fail," in other words, the inner resources of the Jewish people guarantee its existence. The slogan professes faith, but it can be read two ways. Mordecai's declaration is likewise ambiguous.

Mordecai himself shows how to interpret 4:14a by asking in 14b: "And who knows if it was not just for a time like this that you reached royal station?" "Who knows" both expresses a possibility and grants that it is only that. Mordecai believes that it *might be* precisely for a time (i.e., situation) like the present that Esther has come to the throne. (Note that Mordecai does not regard this surprising *coincidence* as proof of Divine guidance.) He raises the possibility that, even before events began sliding toward disaster, some force was preparing the way for deliverance. This notion is teleological and thus assumes the working of some hidden guidance of history beyond human powers. However,

40. See above, n. 30.

41. In its Biblical context it means either "The Glory of Israel does not deceive" or "The Eternal One of Israel does not deceive," in either case referring to God.

it is not stated as a confident religious affirmation but as a possibility, proffered with a hesitancy uncharacteristic of Mordecai. He is confident that the Jewish people will survive but is uncertain about how this will come to pass.

The providence that Esther's rise to queenship *might* show is vaguer than a Divine determination of specific occurrences. Mordecai says "for a time like this," not "for this time." He does not view the current situation as a unique occurrence. There are many "times" like the one in which they now find themselves. If providence lies behind Esther's rise to prominence, that does not mean that she was providentially predestined for this particular situation. Rather, she has — perhaps — been placed in her position to meet exigencies "such as this" as they arise. A Jew does not have a fixed destiny so much as an individual opportunity to which he or she can choose to respond. In the same vein, one might believe, for example, that it *might have been* providential that an eloquent Zionist, Chaim Weizman, happened to be both a talented chemist and working in Manchester during World War I, for these circumstances allowed him access to Lloyd George and David Balfour, just at the moment when Britain was seeking to keep the French out of Palestine as well as win the favor of American Jews — an impressive list of coincidences. Yet, such an assertion does not require assuming that God made Weizman a chemist and showed him how to synthesize acetone for explosives *so that* he could prepare the ground for the Balfour Declaration.

Haman's wife and associates share Mordecai's belief that the Jews are certain to prevail in their historical struggles. They tell him: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, really is of the Jewish race, you will not overcome him, but will undoubtedly fall before him" (6:13). They imply that there is something deep in history, some law, natural or Divine, that makes Jewish victory unstoppable, at least once it is underway. They see Haman's recent disgrace not as a cause but as a *sign* of his approaching downfall. There is a logic in history beyond natural causality, and this allows the wise (as Haman's friends are called here) to discern the direction in which history is moving. Yet, awareness of this logic does not require or lead to a particular theology.

b. Where is God?

In all of this, God is not spoken of or heard from. Is He absent or present? The matter cannot be decided. This indeterminacy is not due simply to inadequate information. *Less* information would have made the book *more* determinate — unequivocally secular. Nor is it due to a lack of interest on the part of the author. The way in which he approaches the issue and then veers aside is too deliberate to show indifference. Nor does the uncertainty derive from some ineluctable slipperiness inherent in language; on most issues of importance the text is quite univocal, and in this matter ambiguity could have been

banished by one word. Rather, the author is carefully creating and maintaining uncertainty.⁴² That is why he hints at God's role, but only obliquely, and mentions religious practices, yet avoids setting them in a religious context. The author must be aware that readers will be expecting a statement that the Jews fasted and cried out *to God* (as we must imagine them doing), or a declaration of faith that deliverance is from the Lord (from whom else?), or a report that the Jews gave thanks to God after their victory (what else would they do?), or an exhortation to thank God in future Purim celebrations (as Jews have, in fact, always done). The frustration of these expectations must be purposive. The religious attitude of the book is like an optical illusion that shifts orientation as you stare at it, but which (to continue the analogy) can temporarily be fixed in a certain orientation by the viewer's decision to see it one way or the other.

God in Esther is, indeed, "veiled," as the popular metaphor puts it, but the veil is not stripped away by the few well-noticed hints. On the contrary, the hints *are* the veil, not a hand that strips it away. A veil suggests that there is something behind it and invites us to peer through. But when we look through this one, we do not see the sturdy old faith that so many readers assume *must* be back there somewhere. We see a light, but it shimmers.

This carefully crafted indeterminacy is best explained as an attempt to convey uncertainty about God's role in the particular events of history. The author is not quite certain about God's role in these events (are *you*?) and does not conceal that uncertainty.⁴³ The author conveys his belief that there can be no definitive knowledge of the workings of God's hand in history, by refusing to exclude either possibility. Not even a wonderful deliverance can prove that God was directing particular events; nor could threat and disaster prove His absence. The story's indeterminacy conveys the message that the Jews should not lose faith if they, too, are uncertain about where God is in a crisis. Israel will survive — that is the author's faith — but *how* this will happen he does not know. Events are ambiguous, and God's activity cannot be directly read out of them; yet, they are not random.

There is a tendency to equate religious uncertainty with a stance of skepticism, and to view doubt as a willed repudiation of belief. But the question, "who knows?," does not foreclose options; it may express an attitude of faith as well as of doubt. If anything is excluded it is

42. Thus, I am not attempting a deconstruction, but, rather, moving the determinacy to another level: the indeterminacy I have described is (I am claiming) the author's intention.

43. Using S. Lasine's typology of indeterminacy ("Indeterminacy and the Bible," *Hebrew Studies* 27 [1986]: 51-56), this is an "epistemological indeterminacy" rather than an "ontological indeterminacy" attributed to God's character. See that article for a valuable clarification of this difficult topic.

disbelief. The author of Esther would have us hold to confidence even when lacking certainty and an understanding of details. To *act* in such circumstances demands special courage, but the demand is not a rare one. Many people are called upon to act on a faith that is hope more than certitude.

When we scrutinize the text of Esther for traces of God's activity, we are doing what the author made us do. The author would have us probe the events which we witness in our own lives in the same way. He is teaching a theology of possibility. The willingness to face history with an openness to the possibility of providence—even when history seems to weigh against its likelihood, as it did in the dark days after the issuance of Haman's decree—this is a stance of profound faith. It is the willingness of the Jew to bear the responsibility that a fickle history lays on his or her shoulders, uncertain of the future yet confident that, somehow, *neṣaḥ Yisrael lo yishaker*.

Another Example of “Minhag America”

MARC SHAPIRO

IN ROBERT GORDIS' INSIGHTFUL ARTICLE, “Seating in the Synagogue: Minhag America,” (JUDAISM, Winter, 1987), he has given us a perfect illustration of how a custom, in this case mixed seating in the synagogue, is able to triumph over a law. This is so despite the fact that “No halakhist has thus far been able to validate the family pew from traditional sources” (p.53). A similar phenomenon, with an interesting twist, can be seen with regard to another area of Jewish law. I refer to the prohibition for a married woman to uncover her hair.

This law is first stated in the Talmud (*Ketubot* 72a), where it is even considered a Pentateuchal prohibition. The reason for the prohibition is because a woman's hair is considered to be *ervah*, (nakedness) (*Berakhot* 24a). The law is duly recorded in the various codes of Jewish law without any dissenting voices¹. The only point at issue is whether an unmarried woman also has to cover her hair. Although this view has not generally been accepted, there are some authorities who believe that in this matter there is no difference between a married woman and an unmarried one.² A direct outcome of the Talmudic law is that one may not pray with a married woman's natural hair in view (*Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 75:2).³

From post-Talmudic sources it appears that the majority of women accepted this law, and there is much discussion in the sources about its exact parameters, with some authorities even forbidding a husband from seeing his wife's hair. With the breakdown of the ghetto walls

1. For discussions of the halakhic and historical literature on this topic see *Ozar ha-Poskim* (Jerusalem, 1965), Vol. 9, *Orah Hayyim* 21:2; Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, *Seridei Esh* (Jerusalem, 1977), Vol. 2, no. 30; S. Carlebach, “*Mar'eh Mekomot le-Issur Periat Rosh be-Ishah ve-Dinei Peah Nakhrit*,” in Simon Eppenstein et al., eds., *Festschrift zum Siebzigen Geburtstage David Hoffmann's* (Berlin, 1914), pp. 218-249 (Hebrew section); Samuel Krauss, “The Jewish Rite of Covering the Head,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 19 (1945-1946), pp. 121-168; and the extremely comprehensive treatment in Moshe Wiener, *Glory of the King's Daughter* (New York, 1980).

2. Indeed, this appears to be very logical, for why should hair be considered as *ervah* only in married women?

3. A number of authorities also discuss whether this law applies to the hair of a Gentile woman. See, e.g., Rabbi Abraham Danzig in his standard work, *Hayei Adam* 4.5, who can arrive at no definite decision either way. Incidentally, from *Sanhedrin* 58b it is obvious that in Talmudic times married Gentile women were also accustomed to cover their hair.

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and the increasing freedom given to women, this law quickly became a thing of the past, and even the wives of many Orthodox rabbis began to ignore what for previous generations had been standard practice. A number of special publications were issued to combat this laxity, but to no avail.⁴ Things have reached the point where today, although the Orthodox insist on a *mehizah*, the majority of Orthodox women do not cover their hair. Such behavior has raised an important *halakhic* problem for, as has been noted, the *Shulhan Arukh* states: "It is forbidden to read [the *Shema*, and by extension all prayer] opposite the hair of a women which she is accustomed to cover."

The obvious question is what to do in a situation where women do not generally choose to cover their hair? The *Shulhan Arukh* seems to imply that it is permissible to pray in such circumstances. Indeed, a number of medieval authorities state that the reason why prayer is permitted in front of the uncovered hair of an unmarried woman is that there is a dulling effect with regard to hair which is generally uncovered. Such hair will not bring about lustful thoughts. The principle behind this view is stated clearly in these sources: only that which is customarily shielded from public view has the potential to bring about sexual arousal. Based on this idea, there is reason to believe that prayer in front of a married woman's hair should also be allowed if this hair is not normally covered. Yet, such an inference is fiercely resisted by Rabbi Israel Meir Ha-Cohen (1838-1933) in his classic work, *Mishneh Berurah* (*Orah Hayyim* 75, note 10). In his opinion, just because women choose to act licitiously and go about with their hair uncovered does not suffice to change the law.

According to him, the *Shulhan Arukh* could have been speaking only of a case where, according to law, the hair did not have to be covered (with unmarried women). If, however, these unmarried women had accustomed themselves to covering their hair *then* it assumes the status of *ervah*. With regard to the hair of a married woman, however, there can be no discussion of "custom," for the law is clear and will offer no exceptions. No matter how many women choose to uncover their hair, one may not pray with it in sight.

Despite the seemingly unequivocal nature of this law, it did admit of some change. Another leading rabbi, Jehiel Michel Epstein (1828-1909), came to an opposite conclusion from what we have just seen. Although he laments the fact that so many women choose to disregard the law, this lack of concern is, nevertheless, enough to necessitate a change in *halakhic* practice. Since so many married women choose not to cover their hair there is no longer the status of *ervah*

4. See the list of such East European publications in Wiener, *op. cit.*, p. 54 (Hebrew section).

attached to it. It is, therefore, not forbidden to pray with such hair in view. (*Arukh ha-Shulhan, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 75:8).⁵

Faced with a *fait accompli* in that people paid no regard to women's hair and did not view it as an impediment to prayer, Epstein updates the law. Here we see the triumph of *minhag* over *halakhah* that Gordis has already pointed out with regard to the issue of *meḥizah*. The important difference between the two is that, in this case, the change of practice has been sanctioned by an Orthodox rabbinic authority. It must be noted, however, that Epstein was not declaring it permissible for a woman to uncover her hair. In his mind, this was a law independent of how women behaved. His decision relates to only one aspect of this issue: the permission to pray with a married woman's uncovered hair in view. Epstein viewed the basic law that a married woman had to cover her hair as eternal and not admitting of any change, no matter what the circumstances.

This was also the opinion of all of the rabbinic authorities in the world, with one notable exception, Rabbi Isaac S. Hurewitz.⁶ It is Hurewitz who uses the same logic as Epstein but goes further than the latter ever dreamed. In doing so he gives rabbinic approval to a practice which is even more in the nature of *minhag America* than mixed seating. It is very significant that Hurewitz also has impeccable Orthodox credentials.⁷ Needless to say, he was very opposed to all non-Orthodox varieties of Judaism, and would have objected strenuously had anyone told him that he had any similarities with them.⁸

Hurewitz was born in the city of Navaradok in 1868, studied in the leading European yeshivot, and was ordained by Rabbi Isaac Elḥanan Spector, one of the leading rabbis of his day. In 1895 he became Rabbi of the Jewish community in Hartford, where he remained until his death in 1935.⁹ His *magnum opus* is his *Yad Halevi*, an excellent commentary on Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, where he shows himself to be a great scholar and a *talmid ḥakham* of the old school. Despite this, he also showed himself to have an independent mind, as can be seen in his discussions of the applicability of copyright with regard to Jewish

5. In our own day, Rabbi Moses Feinstein reaffirmed Epstein's position. See his *Iggerot Moshe, Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, nos. 39 and 42 (New York, 1959).

6. A certain Jacob W. Brecher wrote a book entitled *Katuv Yashar Divrei Emet* (Czernowitz, 1925), in which he claims that the prohibition against married women uncovering their hair is no longer applicable. Not much is known of Brecher, but he was definitely not a rabbinic authority. Rabbi Ḥayyim Mordechai Roller, *Be'er Chaim Mordechai*, Vol 3, no. 52 (reprinted in Jerusalem, 1976), harshly attacks this "heretical" book.

7. See Jacob I. Dienstag, *Eyn ha-Mizvot* (New York, 1969), pp 36-38, and Hurewitz' obituary in *Ha-Pardes* (Tevet, 5696), p. 19.

8. See, e.g., his *Yad Halevi* (Jerusalem, 1926), pp. 136-137, where he attacks Louis Ginzberg, whom he considers "the Gaon of the Karaites," and a man "far from the religion."

9. Morris Silverman, *Hartford Jews: 1659-1970* (Hartford, 1970), pp. 190-191.

books (second side of title page), the practice of giving *kohanim* the first *aliyah* (pp. 92-93), the renewal of the Sanhedrin (pp. 144-145), the binding nature of the *Shulhan Arukh* (p.266b), and many other interesting sections. Yet, without a doubt, it is his discussion regarding the covering of a married woman's hair that is the most significant in the book (pp. 143a-b).

In this discussion, Hurewitz was faced with an obvious difficulty. The Talmud has very harsh things to say about women who do not cover their hair. On the other hand, he was able to see from his experience in the United States that women who did not cover their hair were not the immoral beings who were often portrayed in the rabbinic writings which discuss women who go out with an uncovered head.

It was this difficulty that compelled him to give his own opinion of women who did not cover their hair. He begins his discussion of the topic by reviewing the rabbinic literature. According to him, the reason why Maimonides did not count the prohibition against a married woman uncovering her hair in his *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, even though the Talmud seems to consider it to be a Pentateuchal prohibition, is that this commandment "is dependent only on the place and the time." In a place where the practice is for women, including those who are unmarried, to cover their hair, Hurewitz claims that no woman may do otherwise. Even further, in such a place it is not even permitted for a woman to wear a wig.

Indeed, Hurewitz notes that, according to the early rabbinic sources, it would appear that all women, married or not, must cover their hair. This is surely the implication of Maimonides (*Hilkhot Issurei Biah* 21:17), the *Tur* and the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Even ha-Ezer* 21), who state simply: "Jewish women should not walk in the market place bareheaded, regardless of whether they are unmarried or married." This law has always created problems, and Rabbi Raphael Meldola (1685-1748), in one of his responsa, quotes a great sage who was shocked when he saw that in Italy and Constantinople the unmarried women did not cover their hair.¹⁰

The leading commentators all struggle to rationalize the accepted custom for unmarried women to leave their hair uncovered with the explicit prohibition found in the codes. According to Hurewitz the answer is obvious. The fact that in Italy and in Constantinople the unmarried women did not cover their hair was, itself, the determining factor in how the law should be understood. Of course, even in these two places married women would not dare venture outside of the house with an uncovered head. With regard to such places, Hurewitz again repeats his contention that a married woman must cover her hair and is not even permitted to wear a wig, for if she does it is licentiousness

10. *Mayyim Rabim* (Amsterdam, 1737), *Even ha-Ezer* no. 28.

and she violates the law of Moses, for what difference does it make if it is her own hair or a wig? In fact, as Hurewitz points out, when married women first began to wear wigs, the leading rabbis of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries loudly protested the practice. Although a sixteenth century rabbi had given his approval to the wig,¹¹ such luminaries as Jacob Emden and Moses Sofer strongly protested against this view, which they saw as a total distortion of both the spirit and the letter of Jewish law. According to Hurewitz, those rabbis were totally justified in their protest for the simple reason that people were not yet accustomed to seeing married women in wigs.¹²

The fact is that, despite the attitude of the rabbis and despite all the curses and *herems* which were placed on women who wore a wig, the custom spread rapidly throughout Europe. Hurewitz claims that the reason why the rabbis in his generation did not protest this any longer was that, although it was a violation when women first began to change the method of covering their hair, it was no longer forbidden since the people had become accustomed to this phenomenon. Hurewitz continues:

Yet the women did not stop at this and little by little they began to neglect the despised and miserable wig and to go out showing their natural hair. They did not listen to the calls of the leaders of Israel and this practice has spread so much that today it is the *minhag* in almost all cities where Jews are found, and even more so in our home in the new land [America] where all women go out with an uncovered head.

Hurewitz goes on to explain that not only is there nothing wrong with the new *minhag* (as he calls it!), but he actually says that it is better not to cover one's hair than to put on a wig, which is simply a disgrace for a woman to wear. According to Hurewitz, the status of married women in America in his generation was the same as that of unmarried women in previous generations. Just as those unmarried women did not have to cover their hair because people had become accustomed to it, so, too, married women in his day were no longer obligated to do so. The effect of social reality in determining *halakhic* practice could not have been more clearly stated.

To prove his point, Hurewitz cites the words of the *Tur* (*Orah Hayyim* 75): "It is forbidden to read the *Shema* opposite an uncovered area of a woman's body, the size of a handsbreadth, which is normally covered, and opposite the hair of a woman which is normally covered." The implication of the *Tur*, according to Hurewitz, is that in places where it is the general custom for women to uncover their hair, or

11. Joshua Boaz, *Shiltei Gibborim to Shabbat* 64b.

12. It is interesting to note that Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, probably the leading contemporary Sephardic Orthodox rabbinic authority, is also vigorously opposed to married women wearing a wig; see his *Yabia Omer* (Jerusalem, 1976), Vol. 5, *Even ha-Ezer* no. 5. Among current authorities he stands almost alone in this position.

even other parts of the body, there is nothing objectionable in this. In such localities, these parts of the body are considered equivalent to a woman's face or hands, which she is never required to cover. Some might assert that Hurewitz would not have held this view if he had seen some of today's fashions, for, if so, his assertion could be carried to extreme conclusions. That these extreme conclusions cannot be dismissed out of hand can be illustrated by the opinion of a recent rabbi, admittedly a minority opinion, who, in a sense, reaffirms Hurewitz' view that nakedness is determined only by social mores. If women have no shame in baring their breasts, he declares, this behavior ceases to be an impediment to prayer.¹³ Similar to what we noted before, this rabbi is not declaring it permissible for women to dress immodestly, only that such behavior is not considered nakedness with regard to prayer. It is Hurewitz who extends this idea and turns it into a generally applicable principle.

In order to uphold this radical view, Hurewitz has to consider the famous Talmudic statement (*Berakhot* 24a): "A woman's hair is a sexual enticement, as it says, *Thy hair is as a flock of goats* (Song of Songs 4:1). According to his previously established principle, he claims that this verse certainly does not teach that a woman is forbidden to uncover her hair. Rather, it is simply brought to support the idea that only in localities where women are accustomed to cover their hair is uncovered hair considered an enticement.

Hurewitz also notes that if this Biblical exegesis is taken to be an actual tradition, reflecting a law which applies to all times and places, why did they not also derive that even a woman's nose is nakedness, for it is written, *Thy nose is like the tower of Lebanon* (Ibid. 7:4), or say that the eyes are nakedness, for it is written, *Thine eyes are as doves* (Ibid.4:1). The fact that the Talmud asserts that a woman's voice is a sexual enticement (*Berakhot* 24a) and, yet, the accepted law is that this applies only to a woman's singing voice but not to her spoken voice which one is accustomed to hear, adds further support to his contention.

Hurewitz concludes his discussion by once again referring to the wig:

Our sages were very concerned with the betterment of Jewish women so that they should not be repulsive to their husbands. How can we then come and force the Jewish women to wear a wig on their heads and to transform their glory into a vile disfigurement? . . . If all Jewish women, young and old, are forced to cover their head with a wig, it will be a blemish and a mark of scorn in their [i.e. the gentiles'] eyes and [the Jewish women will appear] as uncivilized savages who aren't fit to enter the land: similar to the Chinese who go about with braided hair. The name of God and of Israel will be disgraced in an awful way as is known . . . In truth, this entire matter, what is forbidden and permitted, is not rooted in the Talmud and codes but in the custom of women in the

13. Ovadiah Hadaya, *Yaskil Avdi* (Jerusalem, 1948), Vol. 4, *Orah Hayyim* no. 9.

particular place and time. All this I have written not for practical application (*halakhah lema'aseh*), but rather to defend the Jewish women [who do not wish to cover their hair].

Although Hurewitz notes that his opinion is not to be taken for practical application, what is important is not whether he felt confident enough to render a revolutionary decision — he clearly did not — but, rather, how he felt about this issue. Even though he did not think that one should, in practice, rely on his opinion, he was still convinced of its correctness. The issue of covering the hair is similar to that of family pews discussed by Gordis. Both have become accepted practice despite the *halakhah*, making both *minhag America*. The difference between the two is that, unlike the family pew, there was at least one leading Orthodox rabbi who was ready to lend his support to this particular *minhag*.

There will probably be some in the Orthodox community who will object to the basic premise of this article. The fact that trends in human behavior can quickly change direction whereas *halakhah* is eternal will, in their mind, render flawed any attempts to show that anti-*halakhic* behavior can decisively influence Jewish law. They can rightly point out that accompanying the religious move to the right in much of contemporary Judaism is a growing trend among young Orthodox women once again to cover their hair, thus showing that a *minhag* cannot develop from violations of the *halakhah*. However, whether this growing tendency of Orthodox women to cover their hair will continue remains to be seen; since no contemporary rabbinic authority has accepted Hurewitz' position, perhaps there is no authentic *halakhic* alternative. Still, the basic idea that *minhag* can both triumph over *halakhah* and also receive rabbinic sanction is indisputable, and one can point to a number of examples to support this contention.

The fact is that many of the very women who would never dream of uncovering their hair are violating a number of explicit *halakhot* which most of them have probably never heard of. For example, Maimonides (*Hilkhot Issurei Biah* 22:13) and the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Even ha-Ezer* 22:20) explicitly state that a woman, *any* woman, is not allowed to be a teacher! In previous generations, when it became customary for women to teach, it was seen as an unfortunate state of affairs that this *minhag* had triumphed over the *halakhah*¹⁴ but, today, who would dare to criticize the Beit Ya'akov schools for violating the law? Most leading rabbinic authorities have by now lent their support to this violation of *halakhah*. A similar example is the law that a man may not say hello to a woman (*Shulhan Arukh*, *Even ha-Ezer* 21:6). Yet, this law is completely disregarded even among those who are generally careful to follow *halakhah* in all its particulars. Such is the great power of *minhag*.

14. See the comments of *Apei Zutrei*, *Even ha-Ezer*, section 22.

Moses Cordovero and Kabbalistic Education in the Sixteenth Century

IRA ROBINSON

HISTORIANS OF JUDAISM HAVE SEEN THE sixteenth century as a pivotal period in the development of Kabbala. The position of Gershom Scholem that, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Kabbala belonged to a relatively small group of masters and disciples who had little desire to propagate their ideas among the masses of Jews, has now become increasingly challenged.¹ However, Scholem's emphasis on the importance of the sixteenth century, when, as he put it: "this new Kabbalism stands and falls with its programme of bringing its doctrines home to the community, and preparing it for the coming of the Messiah,"² seems to stand on solid ground. In backing up this statement, Scholem points to the ethical (*mussar*) literature which, prior to the mid-sixteenth century, demonstrates no trace of kabbalistic doctrine, whereas, afterwards, a majority of such works openly propagate the kabbalistic message.³ Despite reservations which have lately been expressed by Moshe Idel concerning important details of Scholem's presentation of post-expulsion Kabbala,⁴ this point has remained unchallenged.

Nonetheless, the concentration of scholars of Kabbala on what might be called academic kabbalists and their writings, has led to a situation in which the process of the popularization of Kabbala and its study has been largely ignored.⁵ This paper hopes to shed light on this process through an examination of *Or Ne'erav* (Mixed Light)

1. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), p. 244. Cf. Mark Verman, "Mysticism, Indoctrination and Society," unpublished paper presented at Conference on "Education in Medieval Jewish Society," University of British Columbia, 1988.

2. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 250.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

4. Moshe Idel, "One From a Town, Two From a Clan: The Question of the Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbatianism, a Reexamination," paper delivered at conference on "Tradition and Crisis Revisited: Jewish Society and Thought on the Threshold of Modernity," Harvard University, October, 1988.

5. Exceptions to this rule include Louis Jacobs, ed. and tr. of Moses Cordovero's *The Palm Tree of Deborah* (New York: Hermon-Sepher, 1981), and Lawrence Fine, tr., *Safed Spirituality, Rules of Mystical Piety and the Beginning of Wisdom* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

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[ON], a manual for those beginning the study of Kabbala, which was written by one of the greatest kabbalists of the sixteenth century, Moses Cordovero.⁶

Those who desired to teach kabbalistic doctrines, and, in particular, those who desired to reach a mass audience, were faced with a seemingly insoluble problem. They were fully convinced that their discipline was none other than the "Account of the Chariot" [*ma'ase merkavah*], the esoteric lore referred to in rabbinic literature. Thus, they were seemingly bound by the Mishnaic dictum that "The Account of the Chariot may not be expounded even before one [student] unless he is a sage who understands by himself."⁷ In the spirit of this dictum, Isaac the Blind, one of the seminal figures of the first generations of kabbalists in twelfth century Provence, reacted strongly to reports he had heard that kabbalists in Spain were composing kabbalistic treatises which were in danger of falling into the "wrong" hands, as well as openly and publicly speaking of the doctrines of Kabbala.⁸ Even those who, ignoring the warnings of kabbalists like Isaac, composed such treatises, tended to stress the inadequacy of books for the study of Kabbala unaccompanied by oral guidance from a qualified master. Thus, Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi, a kabbalist of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, asserted that the authors of kabbalistic works invariably omitted essential ingredients from their works in order for oral transmission of true kabbalistic doctrine to remain a necessity.⁹ Given this approach, one can easily appreciate the extent to which those desiring to popularize Kabbala had to overcome an ingrained opposition to its popular dissemination on the part of the kabbalists themselves, not to speak of Kabbala's opponents.

The mid-sixteenth century, by which time Kabbala was rapidly gaining in public exposure, saw a major debate in Italy over the propriety of the printing of kabbalistic works such as the *Zohar*.¹⁰ Beyond this, a number of contemporary kabbalists began presenting comprehensive statements of the discipline of Kabbala.

6. On Cordovero, see Yosef Ben-Shlomo, *The Mystical Theology of Moses Cordovero* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1965), especially chapter 1. For an English summary, see Ben-Shlomo's article on Cordovero in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, volume 5, cols. 967-970. *Or Ne'erav* [ON] was first published in Venice in 1587. All citations in this paper refer to that edition. My thanks to Mr. Brad Sabin Hill of the National Library of Canada in Ottawa for making available to me a photocopy of the *editio princeps* which is housed in the National Library's Lowy Collection. I am presently preparing an English translation of ON.

7. Mishnah, *Hagiga* 2, 1. Cf. Maimonides, Introduction to *Guide to the Perplexed*.

8. Cf. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), pp. 393-394.

9. Ira Robinson, *Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi: Kabbalist and Messianic Visionary of the Early Sixteenth Century* (Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 1980), p. 198, notes 21-23.

10. Isaiah Tishby, "*ha-Pulmus al Sefer ha-Zohar be-Me'ah ha-Shesh Esreh be-Italiah*," *Studies of Kabbalah and Its Branches*, volume 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), pp. 79-130.

One of them was the aforementioned Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi, who wrote, among other kabbalistic treatises, one entitled *Massoret ha-Hokhma* (The Tradition of the Knowledge). This was a defense of Lurianic Kabbala against its detractors, and a condemnation of opposing schools of Kabbala. In addition, it served to indicate the benefits deriving from kabbalistic study. However, its exposition of kabbalistic doctrine itself is brief and sketchy in the extreme.¹¹ Similar to Halevi in scope, but much more influential, were the remarks made on this subject by Judah Hayyat in the introduction to his commentary on *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* (The System of Divinity).¹²

On a much grander scale is the work of Halevi's contemporary, Meir ibn Gabbai, whose exposition of Kabbala entitled *Avodat ha-Kodesh* (The Worship of Holiness) is characterized by Scholem as "perhaps the finest account of kabbalistic speculation before the resurgence of the Kabbalah in Safed."¹³

Eclipsing all previous efforts, however, is the *Pardes Rimmonim* (Garden of Pomegranates) [PR] of Moses Cordovero (1522-1570). If Scholem calls Cordovero the greatest theoretician of Kabbala,¹⁴ it is mostly due to PR. Moreover, due to the fact that the bulk of Cordovero's theoretical works remained in manuscript for centuries,¹⁵ his vast contemporary reputation likewise rested on PR.

PR is a precise statement of the nature of the kabbalistic discipline which, building chapter upon chapter, gives the reader a comprehensive theory of Kabbala.¹⁶ It is also, as the author realizes, not a book which was comprehensible to kabbalistic novices, for whom the reading of PR was likelier to cause harm than to do good.¹⁷ Cordovero recognized that PR was, then, inadequate as a tool with which to attract new adherents to his kabbalistic ideology or to refute the counterclaims of opponents of Kabbala or, perhaps, even worse, those of rival kabbalistic schools. Moreover, Cordovero, like his predecessors, saw a need to do just that — to a great extent because, like them, he saw kabbalistic study as playing a key role in the messianic advent and the ending of the Jewish people's exile.¹⁸ Thus, he expended some of his immense intellectual and pedagogical talents to create ON.

11. Robinson, *Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi*, pp. 195-200.

12. Judah Hayyat, Introduction to *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* (Mantua: 1558).

13. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974), p. 69. Cf. Roland Goetschel, *Meir Ibn Gabbay, Le Discours de la Kabbale Espagnole* (Louvain, Peeters, 1981).

14. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 252.

15. Thus, his *Elima Rabbati* was not published until 1881. *Shiur Komah* was published in 1883. His Zohar commentary, *Or Yakar*, began its publication in the 1960s and is still incomplete.

16. Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* (Jerusalem: 1962), Introduction.

17. Ibid.

18. Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 408, note 13. Cf. also Bracha Zak, "Galut Yisrael ve-Galut ha-Shekhinah be Or Yakar le-Rabbi Moshe Cordovero," *Mehkarei Yerushalayim be-Mahshevet*

What, exactly was ON supposed to do? The treatise was apparently left unfinished by Cordovero, and lacks an explanatory introduction.¹⁹ However, his son, Gedaliah Cordovero, who brought the book to press in Venice in 1587,²⁰ states in the preface to it that his father had abridged the material which was argued *in extenso* in PR, to which he added, at the beginning of the treatise, "additional chapters . . . to [cause others to] understand and to teach the usefulness of this discipline and the necessity for learning it."²¹

It is clear from this introduction that Gedaliah Cordovero saw ON basically as an abridgement of PR, done for beginners. We will have something to say on that aspect of the work at the end of this paper. Presently, however, we are interested precisely in these "additional chapters" which come at the beginning. For they give us an important insight into the way a major kabbalistic master saw the study of Kabbala by beginners in an era in which Kabbala was beginning to compete openly for a place in the pantheon of Jewish thought.

To a certain extent, the arguments contained in the first few chapters, though they are unmistakably Cordoveran in their meticulous treatment of the texts with which they deal,²² can be looked upon as the continuation of the genre of defenses of "true" Kabbala against various opponents from within and without the camp of kabbalists.²³ What is new in ON is the detail in which Cordovero describes his vision of the ideal kabbalistic education.

From ON there emerges an image of the ideal Kabbala student and his educational career. According to Cordovero, the student must first of all have attained the age of twenty.²⁴ In so stating, Cordovero consciously opposed those kabbalists who wished to limit kabbalistic study to those over forty, who had attained "understanding".²⁵ Though Cordovero did not mention it in this context, his introduction to PR asserts that his own Kabbala study commenced at the age of twenty.²⁶

Yisrael 1 (1982). On the general messianic atmosphere of Safed in this period, see Solomon Schechter, "Safed in the Sixteenth Century," *Studies in Judaism*, second series (Philadelphia: 1908); R.J.Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo — Lawyer and Mystic* (Oxford: 1962); Lawrence Fine, *Safed Spirituality*, Introduction.

19. Gedaliah Cordovero, Introduction to Moses Cordovero, *Or Ne'erav* (Venice, 1587), p. 3a.

20. On Gedaliah Cordovero, see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, volume 5, col. 967. Other than ON, he also brought to press his father's *Perush Seder Avodat Yom ha-Kippurim* in the same year, 1587.

21. Gedaliah Cordovero, Introduction to ON, p. 3a.

22. Cf. Ben-Shlomo, *Mystical Theology*, p. 11.

23. Cf. Judah Hayyat, Introduction to *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*. Hayyat's treatment of this subject, though briefer than Cordovero's, shows a number of interesting parallels with ON.

24. Cordovero, ON, p. 19b.

25. *Mishnah, Avot* 5, 21.

26. Cordovero, PR, Introduction.

Thus, referring to himself, he could state emphatically in this context in ON, "Many have acted in accordance with our opinion and succeeded."²⁷

Cordovero's own experience is likely also to have inspired him to demand of the potential student that he

first strip from himself the shell of gross pride which prevents him from attaining the truth. He should [then] direct his heart to heaven [to pray] that he should not fail.²⁸

In his introduction to PR, Cordovero claimed to have undergone a similar conversion experience at twenty, in which he renounced worldly vanities and turned to Kabbala. He said of himself that, at the age of twenty, "My Creator aroused me as one is aroused from sleep and I said to my soul, 'Until when will you cause the misbehaving daughter to disappear?'"²⁹

The student, having attained the requisite age and deportment, should also have undergone a rigorous preparatory course in the classic, exoteric Jewish texts. Cordovero, influenced here as elsewhere by Maimonides,³⁰ asserts that the Jewish curriculum ought to be divided into three divisions: Scripture, *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, where *Mishnah* is defined as the entire corpus of rabbinic law and where the definition of *Talmud* encompasses *Pardes* [esoteric studies].³¹ Thus, he stated:

He [the student] must be accustomed to engaging in profound *pilpul*³² so that he might be accustomed and able to strip [relevant] matters from parables ... He must apply himself to fill his belly with [the study of] the laws of the *Gemara* and the explanation of the commandments on the literal level in the work of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, the *Yad*.³³ ... He should also guide himself [in the study of] Scripture — whether [it be] much or little ... [Then] he will not fail ...³⁴

Of course, mastery of these preparatory subjects should not become so complete as to delay inordinately the study of Kabbala. As Cordovero stated:

There are those who imagine that before pursuing [Kabbala], they must first master the science of astronomy. They have other notions which keep them from [following] the straight path. They sanctimoniously give themselves the excuse that their bellies are not yet full of the bread and meat of the *Gemara*. For these poor people, their entire lives will not be sufficient to learn even a bit of [*Gemara*], let alone filling their bellies

27. Cordovero, ON 19b; cf. 17a.

28. Ibid.

29. Cordovero, PR, Introduction.

30. Cf. Ben-Shlomo, *Mystical Theology*, p. 68.

31. Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Talmud Torah*, 1, 11-12.

32. On *pilpul* as a Cordoveran concept, see Ben-Shlomo, *Mystical Theology*, p. 29.

33. *Yad* was another name for Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*.

34. Cordovero, ON, p. 19b.

so that they could partake of this science [Kabbala] and be sated. Thus, the poor people go to their eternal rest bereft of wisdom.³⁵

Beyond proper preparatory study, the would-be student of Kabbala must also possess a strong desire to study the subject:

for its own sake in order to enter into its mysteries, to know their Master and to achieve a wondrous level in the true acquisition of knowledge of the Torah, to pray before their Master and to unify, through His commandments, the Holy One — blessed be He — and His *Shekhinah*.³⁶

By way of contrast, those who desire to study Kabbala merely as one discipline among others, and for whom acquiring “a bit of this science is the same . . . as [acquiring] a smattering of medicine, astronomy, logic, mathematics and the other sciences” are characterized by Cordovero as sinners.³⁷

Having described the qualifications of a student of Kabbala, what must one expect of a teacher of this subject? Cordovero asserts that one who truly desires to study Kabbala should take as a teacher one who has fulfilled the standards he has set for a kabbalist. Thus, a teacher must be one with adequate background in exoteric texts who has mastered Kabbala for its own sake, and not as one discipline among others. To study with one who does not fulfill these conditions will lead the student to error and might eventually result in loss of faith.³⁸

However, what is one to do if one is unable to find a proper teacher? Does the lack of a teacher mean that one may not begin the study of Kabbala at all? Cordovero's answer is that self-study, though it may lead the student into error, is, nonetheless, preferable to refraining from any attempt to study Kabbala. In the end, even such erroneous study has its Divine reward.³⁹ In an era in which teachers of Kabbala were few and manuscripts of kabbalistic texts were scattered, it is not unlikely that Cordovero's accommodating attitude toward self-study reflects the actual situation of Kabbala study.

Just as Cordovero is discriminating with regard to the choosing of an instructor, preferring self-teaching to the instruction of an improper teacher, he is discriminating with regard to the texts that the student should study. Living in an era in which several kabbalistic textbooks were extant, Cordovero advised the student to avoid all of them. The authors of these kabbalistic books, he said, “compose their books in riddles and metaphors so that their message is encumbered by much [extraneous] matter. We ourselves would not do this — God forbid. It is improper to place a blemish upon sanctified things.”⁴⁰

35. Ibid., p. 11a.

36. Ibid., p. 17a.

37. Ibid., pp. 16b-17a.

38. Ibid., p. 23a.

39. Ibid., pp. 15a-b.

40. Ibid., p. 21b. By contrast, Judah Hayyat does recommend kabbalistic treatises in-

Instead of relying upon such books, Cordovero would have the student concentrate mainly on the Zoharic literature and such sanctified sources as *Sefer Yezirah* (Book of Creation) and the *Bahir* (Clear Light):

[The student] should stick with these works lovingly and he will succeed in [mastering] this science on condition that he delve deeply into them and [devote to them] exceptional study. He will then find explanations for most of what is to be found in the books of the latter commentators, which he need not consult. It is not our intention to declare these [latter works] unfit — God forbid — but rather to indicate for the student the path which is short, though it seems to be long.⁴¹

In pursuing the study of these texts, some times of study are better than others. As Cordovero states:

It is certainly easy for a person to study throughout the day. However, the optimum time for gaining profound wisdom is the long night, from midnight on, or on the Sabbath day, which is [itself] a factor. Thus, also the eve of the Sabbath, commencing at noontime, and on holidays, particularly on *Azeret* [*Shavuot*]. I have tried this many times and found it to be a marvelously successful day. Also, there is great success [in studying] on *Sukkot* in the *Sukkah*. These times [I have] mentioned I have tried. I am speaking from experience.⁴²

While studying the optimum texts at the optimum times, Cordovero directs the student to approach his study in the following way:

First of all, [the student] should review the texts many times, making notes in order to remember his studies fluently. He should not delve too deeply at first. Secondly, he should study the material with great concentration according to his ability ... At times [the proportions of] the two forms of study should be increased and sometimes lessened, all according to the need of the hour and the [degree of] peace of mind ... Though it may seem to the student that he does not understand [the texts], he should nevertheless not cease studying, for his Master will faithfully cause him to discover esoteric wisdom ... I have experienced this innumerable times ... Should any subject in this science seem doubtful for [the student], he should wait, for in the course of time the matter will be revealed to him. The essential reward [for the study] of this science is [derived from] waiting for [the revelation of] the mysteries which will be revealed to him in the course of time.⁴³

As previously noted, Cordovero's son, Gedaliah, considered all of the material that we have dealt with so far in his father's ON as merely prefatory to the essential part of the book, which is an epitome of PR. The section containing the epitome is entitled "On the Necessary Preparation for Beginners in This Science."⁴⁴ It was noted earlier that Moses

cluding those of Nahmanides, Joseph Gikatilla, and Menaḥem Recanati. See his Introduction to *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohit*, p. 3b.

41. Cordovero, ON, pp. 21b-22a.

42. Ibid., p. 19b. On the concept of midnight in the practice of the Safed Kabbalists, see Fine, *Safed Spirituality*, pp. 17-18.

43. Cordovero, ON, pp. 22a, 32b-33a.

44. Ibid., p. 33b.

Cordovero, in criticizing the authors of kabbalistic treatises, stated that he would not do the same as they. Presumably he was saying, though not in so many words, that his PR might constitute a suitable kabbalistic textbook. He was definitely saying, through the very composition of ON, that his epitome of PR did constitute a suitable primer for beginning students in Kabbala.

It has been noted that Cordovero's ethical work, *Tomer Devorah* (The Palm Tree of Devorah), began a genre of works in which kabbalistic ideas and motifs tended to control the ethical and moral discourse.⁴⁵ ON begins another trend: the publication of abridgements or epitomes of kabbalistic works. Thus, in the seventeenth century, two other abridgements of PR appeared,⁴⁶ as did abridgements of Elijah de Vidas' *Reshit Hokhmah* (The Beginning of Wisdom), which, itself, was seen by its author, who was a disciple of Cordovero, as a sort of primer leading to the study of PR.⁴⁷ Other kabbalistic works, such as Isaiah Hurwitz's *Shnei Lufot ha-Berit* (The Two Tablets of the Covenant), also spawned abridgements.⁴⁸

ON was never completely lost in the welter of works claiming to lead to the study of PR. It was reprinted several times,⁴⁹ but, perhaps due to its admittedly unfinished character, it never became the major conduit to the study of Cordoveran Kabbala that it was presumably intended to be. Nevertheless, it is a precious document for the historian of Kabbala as well as for the historian of Jewish education, for it enables us to gain an insight into what a major kabbalistic master thought of kabbalistic education in an era in which that education — like Kabbala itself — was undergoing tremendous expansion and change.

45. Jacobs, *Palm Tree of Deborah*, p. 37.

46. Menahem Azaria of Fano, *Pelah ha-Rimmon* (Venice: 1600) and Samuel Gallico, *Assis Rimmonim* (Venice: 1601).

47. Lawrence Fine, *Safed Spirituality*, p. 181. Cf. Mordecai Pachter, "Elijah De Vidas' *Beginning of Wisdom* and its Abbreviated Versions" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 47 (1972): 686-710. Cf. Zev Gries, "Izuv *Safrut ha-Hanhagot ha-Ivrit be-Mifneh ha-Meah ha-Shesh Esreh uva-Meah ha-Shva Esreh u-Mashmauto ha-Historit*," *Tarbiz* 56 (1987): 527-581.

48. Cf. Yehiel Michel Epstein, ed., *Kizzur Shla, editio princeps* (Furth, 5453 [1692/3]).

49. To the best of my knowledge, ON was published in the following editions: Venice, 1587; Cracow, 1647; Furth, 1701; Zolkiev, 1780; Zolkiev, 1851; Vilna, 1885; Brooklyn, 1965. Thus, though it was never absolutely forgotten, its publication history does not indicate an inordinate popularity. Cf. Friedberg, *Bet Eked Sefarim*, vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv: 1956), p. 51.

The Relevance of Leo Baeck's Thought to the Mainstreams of Judaism

ZVI KURZWEIL

A VOLUME OF ESSAYS BY LEO BAECK, WRITTEN in German and published in 1933, contains a chapter under the heading: "Mystery and Commandment" (*Geheimnis und Gebot*), a title probably inspired by Deuteronomy 30:28, which says: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." The allusion to secret things or, in the words of Baeck, to mystery in conjunction with commandment, may not be clear at first sight and requires elucidation; the more so as the subject referred to and discussed in the above mentioned chapter does not represent a minor theme in Baeck's religious philosophy. On the contrary, if we follow the comments of Ernst Simon, who was closely connected with Baeck and possessed an intimate knowledge of the author and his writings, we may state that the polarity of the two spheres mentioned represents, as Simon puts it, the essence of the *Essence of Judaism*,¹ or, as we may say, the very core of Baeck's principal work.

The central position of mystery in his religious thought is characteristic of the older Baeck, who, in his younger years, following the rational trend of the Jewish philosophy of his time that was dominated by the leading Kantian philosopher, Hermann Cohen, had been opposed to mysticism, totally denying its legitimacy as a religious trend within Judaism. This attitude, later abandoned, caused Baeck thoroughly to revise his chef d'oeuvre, *The Essence of Judaism*, in the spirit of his newly acquired positive appraisal of Kabbalah.

This profound change of outlook, expounded in detail in Kurt Wilhem's essay, "Leo Baeck and Jewish Mysticism",² was brought about by Baeck's intensive study of Kabbalistic works, such as *The Zohar* and, in particular, *The Book of Creation* and *The Book Bahir*, to which he devoted full-sized essays that were published in one of his latest works under the title *Aus drei Jahrtausenden* (Out of Three Millennia).

When immersing himself in the mystical tradition of Judaism, Baeck became deeply impressed by what he considered to be its spe-

1. Ernst Simon, *Brücken* (Heidelberg, 1965), p. 389.

2. JUDAISM, Spring 1962.

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cifically Jewish character. Though admitting that Jewish mysticism shares with all others a yearning for the immediacy of the connection with the Divine, Jewish mysticism, in contrast with other religions, according to him, is never *gebotlos*, that is to say, devoid of commandment. Hence, it is an active mysticism, seeking closeness to God by the fulfillment of Divine commandments, not merely passive, contemplative, quietistic, seeking union with the Divine by the concentration of the human mind on the transcendental Being.

In the essay, "*Geheimnis und Gebot*," Baeck says:

To Jewish mysticism the powers that emanate from God are powers of the will; streams of the mystery, full of commandment, streams of commandment full of mystery, they all come from God. The deed, which is the fulfillment of the divine commandment, opens up a gate, so that they flow into the daily life of man.³

Jewish mysticism contrasts not only with streams of mystical thought which aim at a *unia mystica* with the Divine, but also with the yearnings of mystics for the submergence of the individual soul in the totality of nature. I may quote as an example for this yearning a passage from the poetry of William Wordsworth, in which the poet is longing for

That serene and blessed mood
In which the burden of the mystery
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened: — that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on, —
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body and become a living soul.

(*Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*)

This peculiar longing, characteristic of romantic poets who are always close to mysticism, was termed, in German, *Entwerdung*, a quest for evanescence, the merging of the human soul with the Cosmos. According to Baeck, such a mystical yearning is un-Jewish, representing, as it does, a flight from moral responsibility and even from human existence altogether. It is a state of mind close to the Buddhist yearning for Nirvana.

Baeck stresses very strongly the distinguishing feature of Jewish mysticism which, in his view, is active, a mystique of life, a *Gebotsmystique*. He transposed this newly gained insight into Jewish mysticism to his philosophy of Judaism and, henceforth, it became the corner-stone of his religious outlook.

There is only one approach to Judaism and to the meaning of life, and only one way leading to God — through the fulfillment of the divine commandment. Every commandment comes from God, out of the depth of mystery; he who imbues the commandment gains access to God ...

3. *Wege im Judentum* (Berlin, 1933), p. 37.

The stronger the will to do good, the more lively the ethical perception, the more fervent the fulfillment of commandment, with all our heart, all our soul and all our might, the closer becomes our relation to God.⁴

It must be emphasized, however, that, in the context of his work, mystery and commandment are not to be viewed as grounded in a transcendent revelation but, rather, as dimensions of the human spirit, anchored in human experience. When writing about the concepts of mystery and commandment Baeck speaks *expressis verbis* of a twofold experience (*eine doppelte Erfahrung*), maintaining that it is a peculiar trait of Judaism that the two merge into one.

In this context the influence on Baeck of the German Protestant theologian and philosopher, Friedrich Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1824), to whom he refers several times in his writings, becomes apparent. The core of Schleiermacher's doctrine is contained in his definition of religion as "the absolute feeling of dependence on the Supreme Being." This feeling is not to be understood as arising from extremes of distress, helplessness and acute loneliness; rather, it is an element deeply rooted in human nature as such. Hence, it is not merely incidental or characteristic of certain individuals only. Without it, human nature would be incomplete, lacking a propensity for "God-consciousness" which the feeling of dependence engenders.

What both Baeck and Schleiermacher have in common is the grounding of what Schleiermacher calls "God-consciousness" in human nature and experience as well as the view of man as *homo religiosus*. However, whereas Schleiermacher views religious experience as a state of passivity and mere readiness of the human soul to be affected by the Divine, in Baeck's thought it is an active phenomenon, arousing the awareness of an ethical calling of man, expressed in obedience to the Divine commandment. The difference between these two theological conceptions mirrors to a large extent the difference, as Baeck saw it, between Jewish mysticism and the mystical thought of other religions.

Alexander Altmann criticizes Baeck's anchoring of the concepts of mystery and commandment in experiential data, calling it an untheological approach, and saying:

Following in the Schleiermacher-Dilthey tradition, Baeck deals with the theological concepts of Judaism not dogmatically or in the abstract but as expressions of human experience . . . This untheological approach leads of necessity to a certain reduction of religious concepts to a humanist level and is not without danger.⁵

However, in his later works, especially in his book, *This People, Israel*, Baeck appears to view revelation in a more traditional sense, referring, as he does, to the Covenant on Mount Sinai, and asserting that the

4. *Wege im Judentum*, pp. 97-98.

5. Alexander Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Brandeis University, 1981), p. 274.

whole people of Israel became witness to a *unique revelation* owing to a particular gift, the religious genius, with which it is endowed. He refers to a midrashic statement based on Deuteronomy 33:2, saying that the Almighty had offered his Torah to all of the nations, but that only Israel was prepared to accept it, expressing its readiness even before knowing its content. Baeck echoes the assertion of Yehuda Halevi that there is a special *Inyan Elohi* (Divine element) dwelling, as it were, in the soul of the Jewish people, which distinguishes it from other nations. Baeck adopts this idea when claiming that the Jewish people is endowed with a special religious genius, which he interprets as prophetic power. Here we witness an irrational element, deeply ingrained in the religious thought of the later Baeck, which has not been sufficiently taken note of by his liberal followers and commentators.

This innermost non-rational core of Baeck's thinking (says Albert H. Friedlander) has not been stressed sufficiently. One problem has always been his identification with the liberal Jewish movement which stressed his rationalist, anti-mystic, and non-nationalist thinking. But Baeck's self-identification with the Jewish people grows stronger throughout the years, and there are touches of nationalistic feelings even in the 1905 edition of *Essence of Judaism*, where the Jew begins to become a theological figure, a witness — which ultimately means a martyr.⁶

Before I deal with the problem of Baeck's identification with the liberal Jewish movement, mentioned by Friedlander in the above passage, I should like to recapitulate the observation that in Baeck's works there exist side by side, as it were, two concepts of revelation: in the first place it is an individual "humanistic" experiential phenomenon, similar to the conception adopted by Schleiermacher. In Baeck's later works, however, there appears a "unique revelation," viewed by him as internalized by, or rather embodied in, the Jewish people. Now the question may be asked: which revelation is to be viewed as the original, primary phenomenon, and which merely a derivation?

Baeck places the revelation within the historical Jewish experience (says Friedlander) but it is found there in a chain of transmission, to which the contemporary Jew can bring assent or skepticism. And man is to find the revelation in his own experience. He cannot simply give his assent to a system of dogma and move towards the infinite on its rungs.⁷

And so we are back to the problem previously raised by Friedlander, namely, Baeck's identification with the liberal Jewish movement, which programmatically stresses a rationalistic, anti-mystic, non-nationalistic thought to which, according to liberal opinion, Baeck adhered. Hence the question might be asked whether Baeck really fulfilled this "liberal" expectation, or, to put it more bluntly, whether Baeck

6. Albert A. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck, Teacher of Theresienstadt* (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, 1968), p. 169.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

was truly a liberal rabbi? Apart from the Jewish-traditional features of his philosophy already mentioned of mysticism, religious nationalism and Jewish particularism, there is in all of his writings great emphasis on halakhah and the fulfillment of all religious commandments, not only the ethical ones. These attitudes do not easily fit into the framework of liberal Judaism with which Baeck is so often associated, as in the following representative passage:

Only the moral law, as proclaimed in the Bible and expounded in rabbinic literature, do we regard as the permanent expression of God's will. Ritual laws, the laws of clean and unclean, the laws regulating diet and the proper observance of special occasions, in so far as these prescribed ways still retain for us a measure of their former meaning and helpfulness, we accept voluntarily as the well-trying means to a larger and more important end. But when, in the altered mode of our living and thinking, we find these older instrumentalities unproductive of any higher results, or unsuitable to our present needs, we have to exercise our freedom of choice and look elsewhere for the aid we must have.⁸

This is, indeed, a far cry from Baeck's religious philosophy. I might quote very extensively from Baeck's writings, in which he expresses reverence and love for religious commandments, defending and justifying not only the moral ones but also those which some liberal rabbis deprecatingly called "ceremonial laws," and even those which are merely in the nature of a "fence around the Law." He dwells painstakingly on the educational benefit which their observance bestows upon the Jewish soul and emphasizes their great importance for the preservation of the Jewish people.

With ever-fresh symbols they (the *mizvot*) endeavour to keep man far from all that is low and common, to awaken in him that earnest and yet joyful consciousness before Whom it is that he is always standing. They do not seek to lead man away from his own environment; they leave him to his work and his home; it is there and thence that they connect him with God. They demand inwardness, a soul for the action of the hour, and exercise their influence over both.⁹

Baeck goes so far as to call "not inaccurate" the statement that Judaism is a religion of laws, thus alluding to its characterization by Isaac Breuer as *Gesetzesreligion*. In view of all that has been said so far, I cannot consent to J.A. Wolfsberg's contention that Baeck appreciated halakhah more as a concept and an idea than as a living force in the everyday life of the Jewish people. Moreover, Wolfsberg claims that Baeck robs halakhah of its central position by covering it with layers of theology. This, too, seems to me an unsubstantiated criticism. Even other commentators, like Friedlander, state the opposite:

When we consider his theology and its roots in experience, we cannot

8. Israel I. Mattuck, *Aspects of Progressive Jewish Thought* (New York, 1953), p. 28. This book was dedicated to Rabbi Baeck.

9. *The Essence of Judaism* (London, 1936), pp. 273-274.

ignore the experience of traditional Jewish observance which filled every day of Baeck's life. From the beginning Baeck stressed ritual observances which express religious thought and are necessary to establish these teachings in human existence. As we have seen, this was a liberal's stress who loves the law without feeling the need for self-subjugation.¹⁰

The fulfillment of religious commandments out of love of God and not for extraneous reasons is not only the liberal's ideal, but, in the first place, that of traditional Judaism. True enough, Baeck was not a "*baal Halakhah*," but a "*baal Midrash*," as Friedlander puts it, but his deep involvement in the research of Midrash and Kabbalah did not in any way lower the prominent position of halakhah in his religious thought nor did it cause him to deny its centrality in the life of the Jew.

In spite of the inseparability of mystery and commandment, faith and action, in Baeck's philosophy, he adopts a tolerant attitude to even a mere routine religious way of life because it is, in his view, preferable to a life style without religion altogether. He argues that even a routine performance of *mizvot* may eventually lead to a deeper and more ardent religious life, thus alluding to the Talmudic saying "*Mitokh she-lo lishma ba lishma*" (*Pesahim* 50b).

Finally, one more passage from Baeck's writings about the educational importance of the Law mentioned before:

The numerous statutes contributed to making right action a matter of course. They prevented men from being satisfied with feelings that surge up only to die away; they accustomed men to quiet, indefatigable action for the sake of God. Thus, besides assuring the survival of the community, they helped to educate the conscience. The Law was the great pedagogue.¹¹

No wonder that even non-Jewish colleagues of Baeck noticed the prominent position of halakhah in his theological writings. Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, who knew Baeck personally and published a moving biographical sketch about him, observed that, for Baeck, liberalism did not mean escape from the vigorous demands of the Jewish religion, but was, rather, an expression of deep compassion with the world and its estrangement from religion. Ernst Simon calls Baeck a "liberal-conservative rabbi," having orally emphasized the second word of this interesting hyphenated compound. It is interesting because there is, indeed, a seeming disparity in Baeck's thought between his traditional conception of halakhah and the sophisticated liberal philosophy meant to support it. From a certain Orthodox point of view one might say that Baeck has put a rather heavy load on fragile foundations. No less interesting was Alexander Altmann's judgment of Baeck, when calling him a liberal rabbi, but adding that he was rooted in enlightened rab-

10. Friedlander, p. 269.

11. *The Essence of Judaism*, pp. 277-288.

binic Judaism, characterizing it as classical: "In paying homage to his memory," Altmann says, "we reinforce our own allegiance to the classical Jewish heritage." It is "classical" because it embraces all of the three main trends of Judaism: the Talmudic, philosophical, and mystical; it is "enlightened" because it is based on a dogmaless religious philosophy.

Baeck wrote an important essay about the question whether traditional Judaism has any dogmas under the title, "*Hat das überlieferte Judentum Dogmen?*" and the arguments that he marshals in support of a negative answer are based on what literary critics call "internal evidence." He carefully analyzes the relevant texts, establishing their meanings and import in the light of the wider context in which they are placed. He refers to a Mishnah in *Sanhedrin* 10a which enumerates those "who have no share in the world to come," specifically those denying that the resurrection of the dead is prescribed by the Torah, those saying that the Torah is not from Heaven, and the Epicureans. According to Rabbi Akiba also "those who read heretical books or utter charms over a wound . . . ; according to Abba Shaul also he who pronounces the Name with its proper letters."

Now Baeck argues that the heterogeneity of the transgressions mentioned in this Mishnah, some of which clearly bear the imprint of a certain time and a certain cultural situation, indicates that the whole Mishnah cannot be regarded as valid and binding for all times. In support of his generalized contention that doctrinal matters mentioned in the Talmud need not be regarded as authoritatively valid for all times, he quotes a well-known story from the Talmud, *Eruvin* 13a.

For two and a half years the schools of Shammai and Hillel were in dispute, the former asserting that it were better for man not to have been created than to have been created, and the latter maintaining that it is better for man to have been created than not to have been created. They finally put it to the vote and decided that it were better for man not to have been created, but now that he has been created let him investigate his past deeds. . . .

To this Baeck remarks that the majority vote of two schools of outstanding halakhic importance might have created the basis for a dogma, which, however, it did not do, and no pessimistic streak has entered Jewish thought in consequence of it.

Following this argument of Baeck, we might explain as follows the main difference between his theology and the theology of many classical and Orthodox Jewish thinkers, such as Samson Raphael Hirsch. These thinkers did not regard matters of Aggadah as verities to be uncritically accepted; on the contrary, they did not view them all as a necessary part of Jewish doctrine. Hirsch, for example, was of the opinion that they might reflect personal opinions or be interpreted as allegories or hyperboles, or, in some cases, as stories told by a preacher in order to arouse the attention of his audience.¹² As we have seen, Baeck went

one step further, also including in the category of Aggadah doctrinal statements such as those mentioned in the Mishnah *Sanhedrin* quoted above.

In his practical activities, Baeck figured as the liberal rabbi par excellence, officiating in liberal synagogues, teaching at the liberal *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentum* and, finally, becoming President of the World Union of Progressive Judaism. His classical scholarship, his profound knowledge of other monotheistic religions, especially his activities as defender of the Jewish people and faith, and his diplomatic skill, represent accomplishments rarely to be found in the Orthodox rabbinate of our times. He was less successful, however, in passing on to his disciples his love of halakhah and the prominent position that he attributed to it in Jewish life and thought. Had he accomplished this, too, the ideological differences among the three streams of Judaism might have been less pronounced than they are at the present time.

A final remark about Baeck's relevance to Orthodoxy. We have seen that some of his theological tenets differ considerably from those of the Orthodox. However, this difference is more theoretical than practical, and theological rather than halakhic. In Altmann's words concerning the main tenets of Baeck's theology:

Revelation, Baeck says, is the theological expression of the fact that Judaism possesses a sacred literature and history. He also describes Revelation as the recognition that in the religion of Israel an entirely new idea of God first manifested itself in history, and that this new idea is inexplicable in terms of natural development from lower types of religion.¹³

This is a theological position close to that of Yehezkel Kaufmann which, at least, leaves room for the conception of a supranatural revelation. Moreover, in Baeck's positive and almost traditional appraisal of halakhah, he establishes, *de facto*, an important link with traditional Judaism, a fact which has not been sufficiently acknowledged by his commentators and followers.

The Orthodox reader of Baeck's works, though not agreeing with some of his fundamental tenets, cannot help being impressed by the rich, complex and many-sided edifice of his philosophy. It may inspire him to counteract the present religious radicalism and extremism within the Orthodox camp and underscore the need for an enlightened interpretation of the Jewish faith commensurate with traditional principles.

12. "Two Letters of S.R. Hirsch," *L'Eylah*, 1989.

13. *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, p. 276.

The Molten Calf: Judgment, Motive, and Meaning

DAVID E. FASS

Judgment

THE QUESTION, OF COURSE, FAIRLY LEAPS off the page at anyone who reads the story: so soon after participating in the Revelation at Sinai, how could the Israelites have rebelled and constructed a calf of molten gold?

The Biblical material at our disposal seems, at first, to offer judgment more easily than explanation. There is agreement among all of the Biblical references that the creation of the calf was a grave sin, and the initial presentation of the calf incident, Exodus 32, is replete with negative judgments. God informs Moses that, in making the calf, the people have “acted basely” and “have been quick to turn aside . . .” (Ex. 32:8).¹ They are called “a stiffnecked people” (Ex. 32:9) for making the calf, a people against whom God’s destroying anger may blaze forth (Ex. 32:10). Upon actually seeing the calf, Moses becomes enraged, smashes the Tablets of the Commandments on the ground, burns the calf, grinds it into powder, mixes it with water, and forces the people to drink the mixture (Ex. 32:19-20). The people are seen as being so out of control (32:25) that Moses looses avenging Levites on the camp, who kill “some three thousand people that day” (Ex. 32:27-8), and then God (Ex. 32:35) sends a plague upon the people because of the calf.

The recapitulation in Deuteronomy is in complete agreement, even to the use of the same terms: God is angry enough to want to destroy the stiffnecked people who acted wickedly and quickly turned aside from His commandments (Deut. 9:8-14). Both Exodus and Deuteronomy leave no room for doubt as to the judgment on this incident: in making the calf, the people have sinned a great sin (Deut. 9:16).

The other two Biblical references are similar. In making the calf, the people “exchanged their glory for the image of a bull that feeds on grass” (Ps. 106:20), for which God “would have destroyed them” (Ps. 106:23) had not Moses intervened. Though their actions constituted “great impieties” (Neh. 9:18) which would have merited punishment, out of compassion, God “did not abandon them in the wilderness” (Neh. 9:19).

In an incident that seems to mirror the Sinaitic event, Jeroboam set up not one but two calves, one at Dan and one at Bethel (I Kings,

1. *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985). All further English quotations from the Bible, unless otherwise noted, are from the same source and are cited in the body of the text by chapter and verse.

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12:25-33). Here, too, the judgment is decidedly negative. The people's worship of the calf at Dan was seen as a source of guilt (I Kings 12:30). Similar worship at Bethel drew the ire of a "man of God" who prophesied against the altar itself that "Josiah . . . shall slaughter upon you the priests of the shrines who bring offerings upon you. And human bones shall be burnt upon you" (I Kings 13:2). For their continued involvement in these shrines and their calf-worship the House of Jeroboam incurred guilt — "to their utter annihilation from the face of the earth" (I Kings 13:34). So heinous was the making of these calves and their worship that they were, at least partly, the causes for the destruction of the northern kingdom of Samaria at the hands of the Assyrians (II Kings 17:16).

The judgment of many of the post-Biblical sources is much the same. In constructing the calf, the people not only made an idol, but committed immorality and shed blood as well.² The calf was an evil web woven to ensnare future generations, and an evil draft for them to drink.³ The Israelites deserved to be decapitated for the sin of the calf, but were spared only because of the merits of their ancestors.⁴ Of all of Israel's sins, this one was the worst.⁵ All future punishment that Israel might incur also includes a portion due to the calf.⁶ It was so grave a transgression that Israel will continue to suffer for it until the resurrection at the coming of the Messiah.⁷ Had Israel not worshipped the calf, eternal life would have been theirs, but, in consequence, it was lost.⁸ Not only was immortality forfeited, but the evil of the serpent of the Garden of Eden was again let loose into the world.⁹

However, we find that a decidedly different tack is taken in many other passages. Against the background of the unspoken but ever-present question of "How could they?" these sources begin to give motives, possible explanations for an otherwise inconceivable deed. The Israelites made the idol because of the Evil Inclination,¹⁰ or because of the angry and, certainly, misguided idea that God redeemed only Himself [sic] from Egypt and not them.¹¹ The calf may have been largely the result of Moses' soft-heartedness: God had warned him to take only the Hebrews out of Egypt, but Moses had had compassion on the "mixed multitude" who wanted to come along. Since they were previously used to idolatry, they simply reverted to their old beliefs when Moses, the teacher

2. *Exodus Rabbah*, 42:1.

3. *Ibid.*, 42:8.

4. *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, 2:1.

5. *Sifre, piska* 1.

6. *B. San.* 102a.

7. *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, 30a.

8. *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, chap. 4, pp. 179-80.

9. *Zohar*, Gen. 52b.

10. *Ex. Rab.*, 41:7.

11. *Ibid.*, 42:3.

of new ones, was gone.¹² Their acceptance of the Ten Commandments may have been a lie from the outset, for all the while they were planning to worship idols.¹³ Then, again, perhaps the idolatry was really God's own fault for exposing the people to the pagan Egyptian environment which had to corrupt them,¹⁴ all the more-so since Israel was as yet so young and impressionable.¹⁵

The range of possible motives in the Talmud is equally varied. The Israelites miscalculated the hour when Moses had predicted he would return from the mountain. Satan then showed them a vision of Moses' bier and tricked them into thinking that Moses was dead. With Moses gone, the calf was an attempt at a replacement.¹⁶ Elsewhere, the Talmud proposes that the calf was mainly an object lesson that the gates of repentance are always open; that the entire community was not destroyed because of the calf was proof that God would always respond to the penitent.¹⁷ Again, God may have been at fault by spoiling the Hebrews who were given so much silver and gold upon leaving Egypt that they became ungrateful and arrogant.¹⁸ The Talmud even postulates a propensity for idolatry as part of the Israelite make-up, and the molten calf as one among many such transgressions.¹⁹

It is not too great a step from proposing motives that explain the calf to proposing motives that explain it away. One source suggests that the making of the calf, while misguided, was, nonetheless, honorable. The people actually intended nothing worse than representing one of God's heavenly princes, *à la* the vision of Ezekiel.²⁰

Nahmanides (Ramban) suggests that the people had no intention of making other gods. Moses functioned as "*Elohim*", leader, and, when he failed to return, they attempted to create another Moses, another leader. The new leader, the calf, was no more to be seen as a god than Moses was.²¹ Ramban also sees Aaron reassuring Moses that not only did the people simply want someone to show them the way through the wilderness as Moses had previously done, but they were fully prepared to forsake such a new guide if, indeed, he returned. The proof that the people were always prepared to return to Moses' leadership was that they "let" him destroy the calf.²² As either an alternative or a secondary explanation, Ramban also excuses the people by depicting Aaron, along kabba-

12. Ibid., 42:6.

13. Ibid., 42:8.

14. Ibid., 43:7.

15. Ibid., 43:9.

16. *B. Shabb.* 89a.

17. *B. Av. Zar.* 4b-5a.

18. *B. Ber.* 32a.

19. *B. Av. Zar.* 53b.

20. *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, 9:7.

21. Ramban *ad Ex.* 32:1.

22. Ibid.

listic lines, as creating the calf because that was the symbol of destructive forces from the north which were a danger to the people. With Moses gone, it was imperative to find another method to hold those forces at bay.²³

Yet, like all other commentators, Ramban must somehow deal with the Biblical text's own judgment that, in constructing the calf, the people were in the wrong. He proposes, though rather obliquely and by means of a veiled reference to his comments on the Ten Commandments, that the people did err in confusing one aspect of God's power (the calf) with God's awesome and indivisible totality.²⁴ The original intent of the people, however, was not to worship an idol. Only sometime later did they offer sacrifice and worship it, but why this transition took place is left unexplored.²⁵

Judah Halevi, too, is especially forgiving, though he is a rarity in that he also deals directly with the aspect of condemnation. Part of that negative judgment, he declares, is because Israel is a chosen people, a great people, and its sins are judged to be all the more serious in light of that greatness.²⁶ The sin of the calf was mitigated in part by the fact that even the philosophers (of Halevi's day) were unable to dispense with material images.²⁷

Halevi points out that many "images" were a proper and permitted part of the Israelite experience, such as the Tablets of the Law themselves, and the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire. The mistake of the calf lay in fabricating something that God had not expressly sanctioned. The sin was not, therefore, idolatry, but simple disobedience. Not only that, but even the number of those who were guilty of that relatively minor offense was small: a mere three thousand souls out of a multitude of six hundred thousand. Those who "led" the "revolt" were only doing so to root out the evil ones who might go along with such a scheme. In Halevi's day, the evil of their deeds seemed even more magnified inasmuch as people no longer worshipped images.²⁸

Perhaps the most striking pardon is found in *Yalkut Shimoni* on Isaiah 41:24. When the nations of the world accused Israel of the sin of the calf, God investigated and found no truth to the charge! To demonstrate this, God made the calf the first of the sacrifices.²⁹

This apologetic approach remains with us today in another form in modern scholarship. Its point of departure is the early suggestion of Ibn

23. Ibid.

24. Ramban *ad* Ex. 32:4.

25. Ramban *ad* Ex. 32:6.

26. Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari*, part I, para. 93, reprinted in: *Three Jewish Philosophers*, Halevi section edited by Isaak Heineman (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 45.

27. Ibid., para. 97, p. 47.

28. Ibid., para 97, pp. 48-9.

29. *Yalkut Shimoni*, II, #450.

Ezra that the calf was a pedestal on which the Divine Glory rested.³⁰ As Nahum Sarna summarizes much of the current thinking in this regard, Moses was the connecting link between Israel and Yahweh and, when he failed to return, the people attempted to bring God's presence back to their midst by setting up a calf-pedestal on which that presence would rest. Their sin, or rather mistake, since it is to be largely excused, was two-fold: the pedestal was placed in public rather than sequestered in the Holy of Holies as were the *cherubim* that were required in the instructions for building the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:17-22, 37:6-9), and it was a real, as opposed to an imaginary, being. Indeed, the calf story may have been deliberately positioned between the two sets of instructions for the Tabernacle to show that it did illegitimately what the Tabernacle was intended to do properly.³¹ Any number of other scholars have also jumped on the calf's back, so to speak, including Cassuto,³² Brichto,³³ Noth,³⁴ Gottwald,³⁵ Kaufmann,³⁶ and Plaut.³⁷

There are, however, those who disagree, and strongly so. After presenting an impressive array of thinkers who hold to the calf-as-pedestal idea, Lloyd Bailey concludes, "The texts themselves contain no direct evidence, or even insinuation, that the calf is a pedestal, or that a deity, either visible or invisible, is atop it . . . Even if the calf is a pedestal, we must ask ourselves carefully, 'For whom?'"³⁸ T.J. Meek proposes that one purpose of the golden calf story is to attribute the origin of bull-god worship to Aaron,³⁹ while Rivkin suggests that the very structure of the Book of Exodus may have been an attempt to handle the incendiary account of Aaron's creation of the calf, which was far too well-known to dismiss, by surrounding it entirely with instructions for the elaborate Tabernacle that was to be entrusted in perpetuity to the very same Aaron and his sons.⁴⁰

30. Ibn Ezra *ad* Ex. 32:1.

31. Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 218-219.

32. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1983), pp. 407-8.

33. Herbert Chanan Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. LIV, 1983, p. 44.

34. Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, second edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 232-3.

35. Norman K. Gottwald, *A Light To the Nations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 213.

36. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, tr. and ab. by Moshe Greenberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 270-273.

37. W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), p. 650.

38. Lloyd R. Bailey, "The Golden Calf," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. XLII, 1971, p. 97.

39. Theophile James Meek, *Hebrew Origins* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 161-2.

40. Ellis Rivkin, *The Shaping of Jewish History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 32-3.

Motive

How, then, are we to account not just for the calf that was made so soon after the Revelation, but for the extreme polarity of opinion as to its motive? In the face of the unanimously negative Biblical judgment, how can some of the sources seek to forgive what the Bible so categorically condemns?

Brichto suggests that the Biblical text itself is a good part of the problem. As currently constituted it is almost impossible to understand. He claims that,

[e]ven in the most accurate and felicitous of translations the narrative seems to make little sense, both as to form and content. In terms of content, supposedly responsible adults behave like idiots; one hero is cast as villainous and escapes scot-free, other villains are exterminated only to leave associate criminals in the dock; these surviving accused are alternately punished, acquitted, punished again, and again acquitted.⁴¹

Interestingly enough, Brichto presents the confusion in the text in dichotomous terms: form vs. content, adults vs. idiots, heroes vs. villains, those punished vs. those acquitted. Perhaps these dualities are accurate depictions, after all, of the motive(s) of the calf-makers. What if we assume that it is precisely the dichotomous, ambivalent (literally!) nature of the motive involved that makes this story so hard to understand and allows partial and, therefore, largely unsatisfactory explanations to proliferate?

Based on such an assumption, the calf story takes on a whole new meaning. The duality of the people's motive is introduced in the very first sentence: "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron . . ." (Ex. 32:1) Against? Against the very person whose help they were seeking? The concept does not seem positional. It is ideational. The simple Hebrew preposition *al* is used to imply that the people both needed Aaron's help and, at the same time, wished to reject that very need.⁴²

What the people requested can likewise be seen from (at least) two perspectives. In their anxiety over the loss of their leader and guide, the people told Aaron, "Come make us a god who shall go before us . . ." (Ex. 32:1). The Hebrew is *Elohim*, which usually refers to God. Yet, on at least two occasions, this word is used to refer not to God but to Moses. At the beginning of Moses' mission to Pharaoh, Aaron is told by God to be the spokesperson, with Moses "... playing the role of *Elohim* to you . . ." (Ex. 4:16). A bit later, God informs Moses that, "I place you in the role of *Elohim* to Pharaoh" (Ex. 7:1). The people's desire for an *Elohim* at Sinai may also, then, have involved their desire to have Moses back, using the special

41. Brichto, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

42. Cassuto, *Op. cit.*, p. 411. The same dependent/rebellious mood is similarly depicted in Num. 16:3 and Num. 20:2, in the stories of Korah and the waters of Meribah, respectively.

term used earlier for his unique leadership. With the very same word the people ask for both a Moses and for a god.

The same dual perspective holds for the form of that god: the molten calf that Aaron helped provide. Just such an animal was an effective screen onto which dual motives could be projected. The young, tractable calf also grows into a powerful, dangerous bull or ox; they are equated in Psalm 106:19-20. It was a fitting representation of the powerful leader (the bull) and the subdued leader (the calf) who may now himself be controlled by those over whom he once had authority.

The purposes to which the calf was put also turn out to be (at least) dual. It was worshipped as an idol, one that the people acclaimed as a deity and to which they brought sacrifices (Ex. 32:4,6). However, when the people announced before the calf, "This is your god" (*Elohekha*, from *Elohim*) (Ex. 32:4) they might also have been intoning an incantation. As Brichto points out, in at least three places in the *Tanakh* (1 Sam. 28:13, Is. 8:19,21) *Elohim* (and variations thereof) is used to mean ghosts or spirits.⁴³ Far from thinking that the ancient Hebrews did not believe in the raising of the dead and/or their spirits, and in magic as well, we have every reason to believe that they did.⁴⁴ One function of the calf may have been to re-establish a link with Moses, who was presumed dead, and the people may very well have been trying to contact him in the spirit world.

Also, though this cannot be demonstrated quite as directly, they may have been trying to resurrect him.⁴⁵ Several of our sources touch on resurrection or resurrection-like processes to explain why it was a calf that was constructed as opposed to anything else. When Israel left Egypt and crossed the Sea of Reeds (or Red Sea, as traditionally) "... the silver of the idol of Micah crossed with them."⁴⁶ The reference is to a silver plate used by Moses to find and raise Joseph's coffin from the Nile to make good on the promise (Gen. 50:25) that Joseph's bones would leave Egypt with his people.⁴⁷ Legend has it that Moses used three such plates, each with a figure on one side and God's ineffable name on the other. One made the Nile churn up Joseph's remains where they lay scattered on the river bed, the second made the scattered bones reunite into an entire body, and the third floated the casket to the surface. A fourth, with a calf on one side, was not needed and ended up with the gold which the people gave to Aaron to make an image. When it was melted, along with all of the rest, it caused the image to take the form of a calf.⁴⁸ In another version

43. Herbert Chanan Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife — A Biblical Complex," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. XLIV, 1973, p. 28.

44. Ibid., pp. 7-8, and n. 11, and Kaufmann, *Op. cit.*, pp. 78-9.

45. This possibility was originally suggested by my colleague, Rabbi Andrew Straus.

46. *Ex. Rab.* 41:1, 24:1. The story of Micah and the idol is found in Judges 17:1-13.

47. Rashi *ad B. San.* 103b.

48. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1959), vol. 3, p. 122; vol. 6, pp. 51-2; vol. 2, pp. 181-2; vol. 5, p. 376.

of the same legend, the silver became gold instead. Here, all that Aaron cast into the fire was a single golden plate engraved with the figure of a calf and God's Holy Name. As before, a calf jumped out. It emerged lowing because Sammael (later editions read Satan) entered it as the motive force.⁴⁹

We do not know how big a part the bull-god, as connected with the resurrectionist ideas of paganism, may have played at Sinai. Indeed, though early Christian sources frequently equated the golden calf with the Egyptian bull-god Apis, early Rabbinic sources, as we would expect, did not.⁵⁰ We can well understand that when the early Christians claimed not only that the Messiah had come but that he had made his identity known via resurrection, the Jews held even more strongly to the belief that resurrection of the righteous would occur only in the future when the real Messiah would arrive. We can also appreciate how impossible it became to allow any suspicion of the attempted resurrection of Moses to enter the Jewish understanding of the golden calf story. The idea that the Jews themselves had tried to resurrect their leader, but had used an idol to do so, would have given tremendous ammunition to the Christian opposition. This may be why the midrash, while preserving some oblique connections between the golden calf story and resurrection, developed them no further.

The creators of the Biblical tale display tremendous artistic skill in their use of the polarities inherent in the text. The first six verses depict what is taking place at the foot of Mt. Sinai. For the next eight (Ex. 32:7-14) the scene shifts to the summit. The text heightens the impact of what is to come by first presenting Moses' calm, reasonable reaction to God's report of the rebellion. God tells Moses to hurry down the mountain because the people have made the calf (Ex. 32:7), and then He threatens to destroy them and to start to build a new nation from Moses' offspring (v. 10). In measured arguments Moses tries to dissuade God from this course, and succeeds (vss. 11-14).

But before the story rises to its dramatic conclusion, the reader is treated to another piece of literary genius. The action is frozen for a moment between the poles of top and bottom, part-way down the mountain (vss. 15-18), near enough to the camp so that Moses and Joshua can hear some of what is going on, but still too far to be sure of what is happening. Joshua proposes a single explanation: the noise he hears is the sound of war (vs. 17). To this, Moses' response is interesting. Instead of simply rejecting Joshua's suggestion, he rejects both that and, also, its opposite: "It is not the sound of the tune of triumph / or the sound of the tune of defeat" (vs. 18)." Moses attempts, that is, to deny that dual and conflicting motives were operating in the camp or within himself. His final word on

49. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. XLV, and the translation by Gerald Friedlander (New York: Hermon Press, 1970), p. 355, n. 2.

50. Ginzberg, *Op. cit.*, vol. VI, pp. 52-3, n. 271.

the matter is that all is well: the noise that they hear is nothing exceptional; it is simply the sound of song.

Of course, Moses was completely wrong. When he was on top of the mountain he calmly convinced God not to punish the people. When he was part of the way down he reassured Joshua, but mostly himself, that all which they had heard was singing. But when Moses descended and confronted the situation directly, his response was entirely different. Gone were his calm and detachment:

As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf that they had made and burned it; he ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water and so made the Israelites drink it (Ex. 32:19-20).

Moses did not seem primarily concerned with God's prerogatives here, but, rather, with his own. He responded to the sight of the calf as if he was the one who was attacked. So dire was the threat in Moses' eyes, as proven by his response, that even the destruction of the calf was not enough. He continued to see the people even after they had consumed the ground-up idol as "out of control . . . a menace to any who might oppose them." (Ex. 32:35), and sent avenging Levites, faithful members of his own tribe, among the people to execute some three thousand of the rebels (vss. 26-28). Although enough self-control had by then returned that Moses attributed the Levites' actions to God, it is understood that he was acting there on his own initiative rather than at the Divine behest.⁵¹

Did Moses over-react? Probably not. Although it may be that he ordered the execution of some three thousand souls purely out of his own irrational fears, this is highly unlikely. It is far more probable that Moses responded as he did because of a very real menace to his leadership and his life. The severity of his response presumes an equally severe provocation. Here we have yet another duality: the people were apparently perfectly capable of both longing for Moses' return and wishing to be rid of him and his leadership at the same time.⁵² One translation of Ex. 32:35 captures this polarity of rage/dependency quite nicely: "Moses saw that the people was deranged, deranged by Aaron's act to the point of helplessness against any who would stand up against them."⁵³

As the calf episode draws to a close, there is a final duality. Moses speaks to God and states that if God will forgive the people (including Moses!) for what they have done, well and good, but if not, Moses wants his name expunged from the record (Ex. 32:32). This odd request makes sense in light of the understanding that the people rebelled primarily

51. *Tanna de Be Eliyahu*, p. 17.

52. Dorothy F. Zelig, *Moses, A Psychodynamic Study* (New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc., 1986), p. 163, and see pp. 161-173, for a psychoanalytically oriented discussion of the golden calf incident somewhat similar to ours.

53. Brichto, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

against Moses, the leader whom they so desperately wanted back, and only secondarily against God. Moses cannot continue to lead, and sees his very life threatened, as long as the rebellious turmoil goes on. If it does not end, if God does not “forgive” it, then Moses might very well be “erased” from the record. His “request” is spoken in anguished irony and he seems to understand that a line has been crossed both by the people and their leader. The cyclical process of rebellion and forgiveness that began while they were in Egypt has hardened into an enduring and tragic pattern.

Meaning

It ought not surprise us to find a duality of motives involved in the molten calf story. Just such a duality is an important part of the normative Jewish understanding of human psychology. Based upon Biblical material, Rabbinic Judaism finds two opposite forces, the Good Inclination (*Yezer Ha-Tov*) and the Evil Inclination (*Yezer Ha-Ra*) coexisting (from the age of thirteen on) within each human being.⁵⁴ R. Meir even sees a basic duality as part of the Divine plan for the cosmos: “Everything that God created has an opposite creation corresponding to it. God created both mountains and valleys, seas and rivers . . .”⁵⁵ But R. Akiva stresses that the most important aspect of this duality is the psychological one: the tension between both good and evil residing within each person.⁵⁶

It ought to surprise us even less that both inclinations played a part at such a highly charged moment as the Revelation at Sinai. The assumption that the motive for the construction of the calf is both dual and contradictory accounts for the range of motives that we find in the sources, from the most vile and perfidious to the most pure and worthy. In terms of our understanding, we may group those judgments which we might call “good” as focusing ultimately on the attempt to get Moses back, contact his spirit, resurrect him, provide a surrogate to do what he had been doing, etc. Similarly, we may group the “bad” judgments as directed at the attempt to rebel against Moses’ leadership, overthrow him, and gain the personal and group autonomy that had been lacking.

The tools of analytic depth psychology, of psychoanalysis, now enable us to deal more extensively with these dichotomous processes that have been at least partly known for centuries. Freud’s pioneering exploration of the human psyche showed that “. . . almost every intimate emotional relation . . . contains a sediment of feelings of aversion and hostility . . .”⁵⁷ With love there is hate. With dependency there is the desire for

54. *B. Ber.* 61a.

55. *B. Hag.* 15a.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, tr. and ed. by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1959), p. 33.

independence. Human motives, in this context, are almost always at least bi-polar.

The Israelites who gathered anxiously at Mt. Sinai in Moses' absence may not seem to have partaken of the kind of "intimate emotional relation", such as marriage, friendship, or the interactions between parents and children, to which Freud refers. Yet, as members of a group, in fact they do, for "... love relationships (or, to use a more neutral expression, emotional ties) ... constitute the essence of the group mind."⁵⁸ Members of groups are bound, more or less tightly, by ties of libido to both the leader and to each other.⁵⁹

The events of the Exodus indicate that such bonds would have been exceedingly powerful. The passage from slavery to freedom, the turmoil of the plagues, the events of the Revelation, all carry tremendous emotional weight. The orgiastic, frenetic quality presented early in the story in the form of the people rising to dance around the calf (Ex. 32:6) is another aspect of the same bond. Such manic behavior is a common mechanism for attempting to overcome feelings of powerlessness and anger such as those that were engendered by Moses' absence.⁶⁰

With Moses missing, the anxiety attendant upon a new-found freedom, that is both desired and feared at the same time, triggers escape into new dependencies.⁶¹ One result is the calf, which is, in a very real sense, as dependent upon Moses for its existence as the people are for theirs.

Moses' position as leader, guide, arbiter, and judge, is clearly presented in the Biblical text. No matter what the situation, be it fear of the pursuing Egyptians (Ex. 14:10-12), unpalatable water (Ex. 15:23-24), lack of bread (Ex. 16:2-3) and meat (Ex. 16:11-12) or a complete lack of water (Ex. 17:1-3), the people look to him for its amelioration rather than attempting to take the matter into their own hands. They are not at all willing to deal directly with God, but require Moses as their intermediary. At the high point of the Exodus experience, the Revelation at Sinai, the people clearly so declare: "'You speak to us,' they say to Moses, 'and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die'" (Ex. 20:16). The area of Moses' authority that is most inviolable is that he is the sole intermediary between the people and their God.

All the tensions which are usually operative both inter-psychically and intra-psychically are thus heightened to the utmost and given cosmic import. What might have been a tolerable anxiety level becomes an intolerable one when the missing object of that tension is the only known link between the human and the Divine. Out of control, the panic-stricken people create the calf both to restore, via Moses, their contact with the Di-

58. Ibid., p. 23.

59. Ibid., p. 27.

60. Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom* (New York: Avon Books, 1941 [1965 edition]), pp. 110-111.

61. Ibid., p. viii.

vine, and to rebel against him and thus end their terrible feelings of jealousy and helplessness.

We would be mistaken, I think, to see the “sin” of the golden calf as a rebellion against God and against the content of the Revelation. We might properly view the calf incident as a rebellion *to* God. Whether we view the people’s actions as an attempt to get Moses back or to get rid of Moses, or both, they indicate that the bonds remained most tightly knit. If the people did not care, and care deeply, there would have been no calf. They could simply have turned to Aaron or to someone else and continued the journey, *sans* God, *sans* Revelation.

What continues to trouble us, and certainly troubled the authors of the powerfully negative judgments that we find in our Biblical and post-Biblical sources, is that in their profound caring the people stepped outside of the emerging Jewish teachings against idolatry and turned to the calf. The “sin” of the calf is that the Israelites responded to what we would call their Jewish concerns in a decidedly non-Jewish way.

Why? What was the problem? Moses. The existence of a group identity in which there was a powerful intermediary between them and God is precisely what propelled the people to step outside of that system when their conflict regarding Moses became unbearable. As we now know, a complete change was not to take place until many centuries later when the sacrificial rites, with their intermediating priesthood, ceased to function. In the meantime, Moses’ fury helped re-establish the pattern of alternating obedience and rebellion that was to remain a central facet of Jewish history for centuries to come.

Who is in the wrong? It is difficult to find someone who is not. Joshua has not the foggiest idea of what is going on. Moses is reasonable — even generous — when he is at a great distance from the actual events, but when he comes face to face with the reality he responds with a burst of murderous self-defense. Aaron seems only to tread water, to temporize until, perhaps, Moses might return. Whatever his motives, he neither takes over as leader nor does he forcefully uphold Moses’ prerogatives, but tries to find a static, middle ground with the making of the calf. The people, like all people, both love and hate their leader at the same time. Given added impetus by the cosmic implications of Moses’ authority, they express that confusing duality in the ways that we have been exploring.

It is difficult not to side with those who judge the golden calf negatively. It was a tragedy, but a tragedy that we would do well to view developmentally. Everyone fails to handle adequately the dualities that are unleashed when a group of humans tries to make contact with the Divine via an intermediary who is as human as they are.⁶²

Yet the story continues. Moses is soon moved to seek greater wisdom.

62. Christianity dealt with many of these same issues by asserting that their intermediary was not human, but Divine.

To help resolve his anxiety over the calf incident he asks ever greater boons from God, finally beseeching, "Oh, let me behold Your Presence" (Ex. 33:18). The shattered tablets have been replaced, Moses continues as leader in spite of his rage, and the journey resumes.

The golden calf is a failure, a weak point in the developing religiosity of the Jewish people and a clear indication that an intermediated Judaism would remain susceptible to cyclical rebellions. At the same time it ought to give us pause as we wonder in awe at the fact that in spite of the incredible difficulty, that religiosity still continues to unfold. We might even conclude with a note of begrudging admiration for those who made the calf. Their sin, in the main, was not that they believed too little, but, rather, that they wanted to believe too much.

Faith and Works in the Biblical Confrontation of Prophets and Priests

JAKOB J. PETUCHOWSKI

I

TWO DICHOTOMIES ARE CONTAINED IN THE formulation of this topic: "Faith and Works" and "Prophets and Priests." In the common Christian — particularly Protestant — use of those words, the first part of each pair, "Faith" and "Prophets," is considered to be good, while the second part, "Works" and "Priests," is deemed to be bad. It would, indeed, be convenient if the two dichotomies could be combined in such a way that, in the Hebrew Bible, the Prophets might always be seen as preachers of "Faith," while the Priests are regarded as the protagonists of "salvation by works." Whether or not that can be done, will here be examined.

II

Priests and Prophets are, indeed, two different types of religious leadership in biblical Israel. They are often enough mentioned together in the Bible, although not necessarily always in a positive sense, and that applies to the Prophets no less than to the Priests.¹ The Bible also knows of confrontations between Prophets and Priests, such as the one where the Prophet Amos is driven out of Beth-El by the Priest Amaziah, because the Prophet had dared to prophesy the doom of the Kingdom of Israel within the confines of the national sanctuary itself.² On the other hand, we also find the Prophet Malachi attacking the Priests of Jerusalem, because they were not carrying out the sacrificial cult with the necessary dignity and devotion.³ That might, indeed, have been a somewhat unusual "Prophetic" speech, for, to put it mildly, the Prophets were not generally known for their concern with the details of the sacrificial cult. But, at this stage, it is sufficient for us to realize that the Bible itself knows of confrontations between Prophets and Priests.

Those confrontations have led the Bible critics of the nineteenth and

1. Cf. Isaiah 28:7; Jeremiah 6:13; 8:10; etc.

2. Amos 7:10-17.

3. Malachi 1:6-2:9.

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early twentieth centuries to regard Prophets and Priests as types which were opposed to each other in principle. Thus, *the* Prophet was seen as the herald of the ideal, as the man who undauntedly serves his God, and preaches the truth without compromise. *The* Priest, on the other hand, was regarded as the man of compromise, who does, indeed, know the ideal, but who also is aware of the limitations of human abilities, and who, therefore, tries to serve not only God, but also the people — by trying to meet the people's psychological needs through the instrumentalities of the cult.

A picture, so it has been said, is worth a thousand words; and Scripture itself already gives us two pictures in order to concretize the difference between "Prophet" and "Priest." First picture: Moses, the Prophet, stands on top of the mountain in order to receive God's revelation — a revelation which almost at its very beginning contains the prohibition of making any kind of visual representation of the Deity. But the people demands something else, something much more concrete. The people approaches Aaron, the Priest, overwhelms him with donations, and demands that he provide a visible deity. And Aaron, the Priest, agrees. The Golden Calf is the result.⁴

Second picture: Moses, the Prophet, descends from the mountain, and he sees how the people is dancing around the Golden Calf. He throws down the tablets of stone, on which are inscribed the commandments of God, so that they are smashed at the foot of the mountain. Evidently, the people was not worthy to receive a divine revelation, and the Prophet draws the consequences.⁵

Because the Bible itself already seemed to establish the dichotomy between Prophet and Priest, some Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries found it easy to accept the dichotomy between Prophet and Priest which Protestant biblical criticism had been asserting. The Hebrew writer, Asher Ginzberg (1856-1927), who wrote under the *nom-de-plume* Aḥad Ha'Am, in a famous essay on this theme, appropriated the picture of "Prophet and Priest" which Protestant biblical criticism had drawn.⁶ And the composer, Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951), at first alienated from his native Judaism and later returning to it, created, in his opera, *Moses and Aaron*, for which he himself wrote the libretto, an artistic expression of the contrast between "Prophet" and "Priest."

The dichotomy between "Prophet" and "Priest" was important also to Reform Judaism, which originated in the nineteenth century. In its rejection of many of the ceremonial provisions of the Jewish tradition, as well as in its stress of the ethical contents of that heritage, it regarded itself as the successor of "the religion of the Prophets," — a claim which, wheth-

4. Exodus 32:1-6.

5. Exodus 32:15-19.

6. "Kohen Wenabhi," in *Kol Kithebhé Aḥad Ha'Am*, Fifth edition (Tel-Aviv/Jerusalem, 1956), pp. 90-92.

er justified or not, is still very much a part of latter-day Reform Jewish rhetoric. For, in the view of those Reformers, which they had adopted from the Protestant Bible critics, the biblical Prophets not only rejected the kind of ceremonial cult which was unaccompanied by moral deeds, but religious ceremonies as such. The Prophets were perceived as the sworn enemies of any kind of cult. If this view of the Prophets did not altogether emerge from a simple reading of the text of the Prophetic books in the Bible, then the biblical text was simply "emended" by omitting such verses as stood in the way of the desired theory as "later glosses" which were inserted by "priestly hands" in the redaction process. That is how the Hebrew Prophets were still taught in the late Forties of this century, when the present writer attended a Reform rabbinical seminary.

Of late, one has become a little more cautious in proclaiming the unmitigated Prophetic opposition to the cult as such. The suspicion is increasingly voiced that the sharp contrast which earlier biblical criticism had drawn between the religion of the "Prophet" and the religion of the "Priest" — and of the occasional "synthesis" between the two, as is the case with the Book of Deuteronomy or with the Prophet Ezekiel — represented too mechanical an acceptance of Hegelian philosophy with its "thesis," "antithesis," and "synthesis." After all, at the time when Wellhausen developed his theories of the Higher Criticism of the Bible, Hegel's philosophy was still very much *en vogue* in German academic life.

Pure "types" are often possible — in theory. In actual life, they are less likely to be found. We can regard the "Prophets" as uncompromising opponents of the cult as such, only if, on the basis of an *a priori* theory, we omit those verses from the Prophetic books which, with all of their emphasis on the primacy of the moral life, nevertheless still regard the cult as something acceptable to God.

More recent biblical scholarship, by way of contrast, has even spoken of "cultic prophets," that is to say, of Prophets who voiced their criticism of cult and society within the cult itself! It is now thought that, in some sanctuaries, Prophets were no less officially "employed" than were the Priests, and that it was actually *expected* of those Prophets that they voice their criticisms as part of the cult. Nobody claims that all of the biblical Prophets were "cult prophets." Most of them were very probably nothing of the sort. But perhaps the modern ministry might provide some kind of analogy. There are Christian ministers and Jewish rabbis who serve very well-to-do congregations, congregations, moreover, which *expect* their clergy to criticize, on occasion, the very structure of society which makes the existence of well-to-do churches and synagogues possible. And some congregants can get to be very disappointed if they do not hear a "Prophetic" word of criticism every once in a while.

III

And what about the Priests and their religion? Certainly, it was the task of the Priests to perform the sacrificial cult; and it is clear that many a modern person — perhaps more for aesthetic than for theological reasons — shrinks back from the thought that God can be “served” by slaughtering animals, burning their flesh, and sprinkling their blood. Nor do we wish to be understood as trying to *justify* the sacrificial cult here. But that cult must be seen in terms of the religious meaning which it had in its own age in history, and within its own environment. For the people in biblical days, the sacrificial cult signified one way in which God could be approached. That is why, with full etymological justification, Martin Buber translated the Hebrew word *qorban*, commonly rendered in German as *Opfer* (“sacrifice”), with the somewhat unusual word *Darnahung*, which would mean something like “approaching gift.”⁷

Moreover, did the sacrificial cult necessarily *have* to be something purely “external,” as its modern critics accuse it of having been? Bear in mind: The Israelite farmer “sacrifices” (in a very real and economic sense) a valuable animal from his meager herd — either because he is conscious of some guilt, or because he wishes to celebrate a feast with his family, — a feast in which God, too, as it were, is invited to participate. (One cannot help thinking of one of the American Protestant forms of the Grace before Meals: “Be present at our table, Lord, . . .”) Might this not also have led to a kind of religious experience, which did not conflict at all with the religion of the Prophets? Modern Christians, whose theology and liturgy are still totally suffused with the sacrificial idea, might perhaps be expected to have a greater appreciation of the old biblical sacrificial cult than modern non-Orthodox Jews, from whose theology and liturgy the sacrificial idea has been almost completely expurgated.

When one reads the Book of Leviticus carefully, one becomes aware of the fact that a confession of sins was part of the ritual of bringing a sin offering. That was hardly something purely “external.” Nor can many of the psalms, which to this day, in both synagogue and church, help to inspire true devotion “in spirit and in truth,” be called something purely “external.” Yet the psalms have been preserved for us because, at one time, they were sung by the Levites in the Jerusalem Temple. The Book of Psalms, it has aptly been said, is the Hymnal of the Second Temple. There is a great deal of “the Prophets” in that Book of Psalms, for the psalmists sing of the nearness of God, and of the love and righteousness which that nearness of God is meant to evoke in human life. Surely, that would have to be described as “Prophetic religion.”

Of course, Priests can also be prosaic. The style of the so-called Priestly Code in the Pentateuch, with its long lists of names, of cultic procedures, and of temple vessels, certainly makes a rather prosaic impression.

7. See, e.g., Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift*, at Leviticus 1:2.

But the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, which, in an elevated style, describes (or sings about) God's creation of the Universe, is also a component of the Priestly Code!

Is it possible for the cultic religion of the Priests to deteriorate into something purely external? Obviously it is possible; and, judging by what the Prophets have to say, it frequently did so. But it need not inevitably do so. For the Priest's religion can also serve as a support for the religion of the Prophet. The Prophet receives his message from God, and he begins his words with: "Thus saith the Lord." But the Priest, too, with his priestly *torah*, is mediating the Word of God to the people. That, at any rate, is the way in which one of the Prophets, Malachi, conceives of the role of the priesthood:

For the Priest's lips shall keep knowledge,
and people shall seek *torah* at his mouth;
for he is a messenger of the Lord of hosts.⁸

The supposed contrast between Prophetic religion and Priestly religion is a real contrast only when the religion of the Priest fails. Ideally, the religion of the Prophet and the religion of the Priest complement each other — in the service of the Lord of hosts. A contrast drawn too sharply between them might fit into the philosophical scheme of Hegel or into the theology of Protestantism and nineteenth-century Reform Judaism. But it does not do justice to the religion of the Bible. And if one uses the supposed dichotomy between "Prophet and Priest" in order to understand the supposed dichotomy between "Faith and Works," one might altogether be off to a wrong start.

IV

Even if we were to accept the sharp contrast between "Prophet and Priest" as a working hypothesis, we would still have a problem on our hands if we attempted to see in that contrast also the contrast between "Faith and Works." For as clear as it is that the Apostle Paul felt the dichotomy between "Faith and Works" very keenly,⁹ and as apparent as it is that at any rate *some* of the ancient Rabbis, too, addressed themselves to that problem, it is by no means clear that the relationship between "Faith and Works" is regarded as at all problematical by the Hebrew Bible, or that the Hebrew Bible sees the Prophets as the champions of "Faith" over against a "priestly" advocacy of "Works."

Faith is *presupposed* in the Hebrew Bible. Without faith, there would have been no Bible. The Priest has faith in the God whose *torah* he teaches to the people, and the Prophet has faith in the God whose message of salvation or of doom he proclaims. The Psalmist has faith in the God to whom he dedicates his poetic art, and the Sage has faith in the God, who,

8. Malachi 2:7.

9. Cf., e.g., Romans, chapters 7 and 8.

after all, is involved when the problem of theodicy is discussed in the Book of Job, or when God's Wisdom is identified as the instrument of the world's creation in the Book of Proverbs. It is altogether impossible to conceive of the Bible without recognizing that faith is everywhere presupposed.

Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) may, indeed, have been right in his assertion that there is no express commandment in the Hebrew Bible which states: "You shall have faith in God!" But there does exist something quite similar, namely those biblical verses in which we are told: "You shall know the Lord!," which, *pace* Mendelssohn, amounts more or less to the same thing. And then there is Exodus 20:3, "I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage." In Judaism, this verse is considered to be the first of the Ten Commandments, and, in Rabbinic literature, that "commandment" is interpreted as though it actually read: "*I am to be* the Lord, your God!"¹⁰ Or, as it is put by the *Mishnah*: "Only when one has first accepted the yoke of God's rule, can one then accept the yoke of the commandments."¹¹ Admittedly, this formulation is already Rabbinic, and not biblical. But, in this instance, the Rabbis seem to have quite clearly seen what the Bible had in mind.

The Hebrew verb *le-ha-amin* — "to believe, to trust" — and the Hebrew noun *emunah* — "faith," "belief" — have the basic meaning of "trusting," "being loyal," "relying on God." Martin Buber understood this correctly, even though his book, *Two Types of Faith* (London, 1951), is not to be counted among his better works, — precisely because he attempted to establish differences between the Jewish *emunah* and the Christian *pistis* which fail to do justice to both *pistis* and *emunah*. One could conceivably discover, with the help of a concordance, that the verb *le-ha-amin* occurs more often in the Prophetic canon than it does in those biblical writings which are commonly assigned to the Priestly Code. In this connection, one thinks, for example, of Isaiah 7:9, "Have firm faith, or you will fail to stand firm," as the *Revised English Bible* translates it in an attempt to capture the Prophetic pun of the Hebrew original: *im lo tha-aminu, ki lo the-amenu*.

Indeed, the Prophets call for faith and for the regaining of faith in times of doubt and backsliding. They also do that in times when the Priests merely seem to presuppose the existence of faith. And when, in the opinion of the Prophets, the religion of the Priests threatens to conceal what — in the eyes of the Prophets — are the basic implications of faith, the Prophets do not shrink from criticizing the "priestly" religion.

But, and here we come to the main point, when the Prophets criticize the "priestly" religion with its cult and ceremonies, they do *not* counter the priestly "works" with a call for mere "faith," but rather for a "faith"

10. Cf. Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Die Stimme vom Sinai* (Freiburg i. Br., 1981), pp. 23-26.

11. *Mishnah Berakhoth* 2:2.

which is translated into “works.” Thus the Prophet Amos can say in God’s name:

I loathe, I spurn your festivals,
I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies.
If you offer Me burnt offerings — or your meal offerings —
I will not accept them;
I will pay no heed
to your gifts of fatlings.
Spare Me the sound of your hymns,
and let Me not hear the music of your lutes.

That is to say, Amos totally condemns the priestly cult, because the people see in it a substitute for moral conduct, as the context makes clear. But it is not “faith” which is here counterposed to the priestly “works,” for Amos continues:

But let justice well up like water,
righteousness like an unfailing stream.¹²

Again, the Prophet Micah raises this question:

With what shall I approach the Lord,
do homage to God on high?
Shall I approach Him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Would the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with myriads of streams of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for my sins?

Micah rejects all of those cultic acts, and continues by saying:

He has told you, O man, what is good,
and what the Lord requires of you:
Only to do justice,
and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.¹³

And the Prophet Isaiah speaks in God’s name:

“What need have I of all your sacrifices?”
Says the Lord.
“I am sated with burnt offerings of rams,
and suet of fatlings,
and blood of bulls;
and I have no delight
in lambs and he-goats.”

And so on, and so forth, — including the prayers addressed to God. What God really demands is:

Wash yourselves clean;
put your evil doings
away from My sight.

12. Amos 5:21-24.

13. Micah 6:6-8.

Cease to do evil;
learn to do good.
Devote yourselves to justice;
aid the wronged.
Uphold the rights of the orphan;
defend the cause of the widow.¹⁴

What emerges from all this is the fact that the religion of the Prophets demands no fewer “works” than does the religion of the Priests. Prophets and Priests might argue about what “works” are really acceptable to God. The Prophets consider a cult, which is unaccompanied by a moral life, to be totally worthless. Among the Priests, on the other hand, there may occasionally have been those who put the cult in first place, even when it remained unaccompanied by a moral life. Here the conflict between Prophet and Priest originated.

But that conflict was not an argument about the duty of serving God, or about the need for faith as a precondition of that service. Nor was it an argument about the fact that one serves God with human “works.” The argument, instead, turns on the question of whether the “works” are to be of a cultic or of an ethical kind, or, perhaps, of a combination of both of them. And that means that, even if we were to accept the sharp contrast, posited by nineteenth-century biblical criticism, between prophetic and priestly religion, that contrast is in no way identical with any dichotomy between “Faith and Works.”

Such a dichotomy is a novelty of the New Testament, although, to some extent, it is also reflected in Rabbinic literature. But as far as the Hebrew Bible is concerned, such a dichotomy does not come within its purview. The divine commandment, addressed to the believing human being, demands the human deed, — the “works” through which human beings “attest” their faith and live “in *emunah*.” A contrast between the religion of the Prophet and the religion of the Priest in terms of any “Faith and Works” problem can, therefore, no more be found in the Hebrew Bible than can any contrast between “Faith and Works” as such.

14. Isaiah 1:11-17.

Identity and Authority in Ancient Judaism

MARTIN GOODMAN

THE MODERN DEBATE ON “WHO IS A JEW?” has become heated, not least because it involves a conflict of authority between different jurisdictions, each of which claim the right to define or assign Jewish identity. It is the purpose of this article to document a parallel phenomenon in the period of the Second Temple, the Mishnah and the Talmud — a phenomenon which, as far as I know, has been left unconsidered in the voluminous recent scholarship on Jewish identity in antiquity. How did anyone in the ancient world *know* that he or she was Jewish? Or, to put it another way, who decided who was a Jew? In what context was such a decision made? To anticipate the conclusion: if it can be shown that a variety of such decisions, and the uncertainties that they undoubtedly engendered, were common two thousand years ago, we may throw modern dilemmas into perspective.

In the ensuing pages it will emerge that there were at least five main ways of establishing the Jewishness of an individual in antiquity. Sometimes, his affirmation that he was a Jew might suffice, at least to his own satisfaction. Alternatively, some central Jewish authority might take to itself the right to define status. Local Jewish communities might decree which among their number really belonged to them. Local gentiles might arrogate the task to themselves. Or the gentile state might select Jews from the general population for its own purposes. Some combination of these possibilities was also likely enough — and, in the case of most Jews, all sources of authority doubtless agreed on their Jewishness. The question of authority will have arisen mostly in discussions or assumptions about the status of those who might be seen by some as on the fringes of the community, when different definitions by the various perceived authorities may have clashed. In what follows, illustrations of each of these sources of authority for defining Jewishness will be examined in turn.

Not surprisingly, the role of a strong central authority in defining Jewish status is clearly attested in this period only in the land of Israel itself. The actions of Hasmonaean High Priests in the conversion of Idumaeans (in the 120s B.C.E.) and Ituraeans (in c. 104 B.C.E.) presupposed that such unilateral action, involving the forced circumcision of males, could turn gentiles into Jews. In other respects, too, the Temple authorities at all times had to make decisions about who was Jewish. So, for instance, some types of offerings could probably be offered

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up by the priests only if they had been brought by an Israelite. More drastically, gentiles were excluded from the inner courts of the Temple on pain of death, a prohibition backed up by force, as Josephus recorded, and as surviving fragments of the Temple inscription warning against infringements confirm.¹ For the preservation of the purity of the Temple, mistakes could not be countenanced.

However autocratic they may have been within the sanctuary, those who controlled the Temple never had the capacity, outside its confines, to impose very widely their idea of who was a Jew. Those adherents of the faith who never brought an offering to the Temple would never subject their status to scrutiny. This category will have included most such adherents who lived in the diaspora and who, despite the Biblical requirement of thrice-yearly pilgrimages, never went to Jerusalem. There is good evidence that the priests in Jerusalem could not — and probably did not usually try to — impose their will on the diaspora. So, for instance, a rival Jewish temple which offered cultic ceremonies similar to the Jerusalem shrine flourished at Leontopolis in Egypt, apparently without serious challenge, from c. 160 B.C.E., until it was closed down by the Romans in 73 C.E. as a possible centre of disaffection (Josephus, *Jewish War* 7. 420-36).

At any rate, any role played by the Jerusalem priests in deciding on Jewish status came to an abrupt end with the destruction of the Temple sanctuary and the city in 70 C.E. Late rabbinic reconstructions of Jewish history affirm an immediate, successful assumption of authority by groups of learned sages led first by Yoḥanan b. Zakkai, then by the descendants of Hillel and others. Such a reconstruction does not accord fully with the evidence of the earliest compilations of rabbinic teaching. In the Mishnah, which reached its present form (more or less) in about 200 C.E., and the Tosefta, which probably dates to c. 250 C.E., it is taken for granted that the rabbis operate even in the Holy Land among Jews who do not take seriously many of the religious matters which were of great concern to the rabbis themselves. Many of such Jews, particularly those of doubtful status as Jews, among those termed *ammei ha-arez* by the Sages, presumably would not have taken kindly to attempts by the rabbis to impose their criteria for Jewish status on the rest of the population. I have, indeed, suggested elsewhere that the discussions to be found in early rabbinic legal texts about social relations between Jews and gentiles may, when they are not purely theoretical, reflect the Sages' attitudes to those who defined themselves as Jews but by criteria which the Sages did not accept. In favour of this hypothesis (which remains unprovable) is the mass of legislation about gentile-Jewish relations in rabbinic texts from Galilee. Without such an hypothesis it is difficult to explain the rabbis' concern with

1. J.B. Frey, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* II (1952), no. 1400, pp. 328-30.

the practicalities of social and commercial dealings with gentiles, for near-contemporary pagan and Christian sources describe the area of Galilee as inhabited exclusively by Jews.²

In the diaspora and in remote villages in the land of Israel it could have been more feasible to leave questions of status to the local communal authorities. Jews, in theory, needed to know quite often whether those with whom they came into social contact were Jewish or gentile. As Tacitus remarked (*Histories* 5.5), Jews were “separate in their meals and their beds.” The question was acute when marriage was proposed, for Jews *believed* that they married only other Jews — even if, in practice, there were exceptions. Similarly, if Jews believed that gentiles handling their food or wine could pollute it, it ought to have been impossible to leave the status of associates in doubt.

And, yet, the impression is that, up to the end of the first century C.E., it was doubt that prevailed. Josephus (*Jewish War* 7.41) wrote of gentiles in Syrian Antioch whom the Jews had “in a certain way made a part of their community;” it is quite unclear whether either Josephus or the Antiochene Jews thought of these adherents as Jews or as friendly gentiles. In another passage, which is theologically incomprehensible (at least to me), Josephus affirms (*Antiquities* 14. 403) that the Idumaeans, whose ancestors had been forcibly circumcised in the second century B.C.E. (see above), were now “half-Jews.” References to friendly gentiles in texts of the first century C.E. or earlier are so ambiguous or untrustworthy that the very existence of a *category* of gentile “god-fearers” has been attacked as a figment of modern scholarship.³

Where there was only one synagogue and one set of Jewish authorities in a city, *ad hoc* decisions on such matters might bring some clarity, but, in bigger cities such as Rome, where at least ten individual synagogues whose names are attested on inscriptions seem to have been independently organized, a conflict of jurisdiction was all too likely. In any case, for those gentiles, like the royal family of Adiabene, whose conversion to Judaism took place in a context where no Jewish community yet existed (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20. 17-53), some other authority for confirmation of their Jewish status must have been sought.

The story of the Adiabeneans seems to imply the possibility, at least, that, in some sense, an individual could decide for himself or herself whether he or she was Jewish. Proselytes were seen as those who *brought themselves* to the Jewish nation or faith or God; the word “proselyte” is derived from the Greek word *proserchesthai*, which means “to approach” or “to come to.” Types of proselytes described as *gerim gerurim*, who were attacked by rabbis in texts of the third century C.E. and later as not genuine converts, are believed by some scholars to have been precisely

2. M. Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132-212* (1983), pp. 41-53.

3. A.T. Kraabel, “The Disappearance of the ‘Godfearers’”, *Numen* 28 (1981): 113-26.

such self-made proselytes, which would suggest, of course, that such people existed (but that, for those rabbis, at least, an affirmation of faith did not suffice to make one Jewish). But difficulties in interpreting this term, which can also be understood quite differently, preclude too much reliance on this argument.⁴

It might seem that the role of *gentile* authorities in the definition of Jewishness should have been negligible. So, doubtless, it was, in areas where there was a Jewish majority or state, as in Judaea before 70 C.E., but there were occasions when outsiders may have had some role to play.

Thus, for instance, the Greek cities of Asia Minor, largely under pressure from Julius Caesar, who wished to ensure the loyalty of the Jews to his side during the Roman civil war against Pompey, offered various privileges to the Jews in their midst in the mid-first century B.C.E. They must have drawn up some criteria or list to clarify which inhabitants of the city should benefit: according to the decrees preserved by Josephus in his *Antiquities*, Jews in these places were granted, among other benefits, a special exemption from military service and from appearing in law courts on the Sabbath. It is not clear how a law suit could be temporarily postponed by an unexpected appeal by one of the parties to his privilege of not answering charges on Saturdays. Perhaps the court simply took the appellant's word, or had a hearing on the question. Perhaps local Jewish leaders provided the civic magistrates with the names of members of the Jewish community. Perhaps some other means was used. We do not know.

There was, in theory, much greater potential for the definitions of Jewishness that were imposed by the *Roman state* to have an effect on Jewish self-awareness, if only because here, at least, was an authority which could impose its will on the great majority of Jews and which, at various times, needed to know precisely who was Jewish. On the one hand, after 70 C.E. Rome extorted a special poll tax which only Jews, and all Jews in the Roman Empire, were required to pay. The effects of this tax, known as the *fiscus Judaicus* (literally, the Jewish treasury), will be discussed further below. On the other hand, the sons of Jews were specifically exempted, from the mid second century C.E. on, from the ban on circumcision which was introduced by the emperor Hadrian. Around the time of the Bar Kochba revolt, Hadrian equated circumcision with castration, as barbarous practices unworthy of his enlightened rule, but his successor, Antoninus Pius, felt impelled to mollify Jewish feelings by permitting the continuation of this ancestral custom, while insisting that any non-Jew who indulged in the practice would incur the death penalty. There is good evidence that people other than Jews (Samaritans, and some Arabs and Egyptians, for example) had

4. Against the standard understanding of *gerim gerurim*, see E. Bammel, *Judaica: Kleine Schriften* I (1986), pp. 134-39.

previously been in the habit of circumcising boys, and that these non-Jews were effectively prevented from doing so in the future. Before he imposed the ultimate sentence on an offending circumciser, a Roman judge must have had ways of knowing with some certainty that the culprit before him was definitely not a Jew.

But a concern of this kind by the Roman state to make clear who was a Jew is not attested or, indeed, plausible, before the last years of the first century C.E. In the rest of this discussion I shall explore the hypothesis that the ambiguities about status, which, as has been shown, were tolerated with (to us) surprising ease until then, gave way after that date to a new Jewish awareness of a need for greater clarity; and that this new awareness was precipitated, as so often in Jewish history, by the attitude of the outside world — in this case, the Roman state.

The immediate factor which led to change was the reform by the emperor Nerva of the exaction of the special Jewish poll tax, the *fiscus Judaicus*. As was noted above, this tax was imposed on Jews after 70 C.E. by the emperor Vespasian, after the suppression of the great revolt and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The levy was intended both as a punishment for rebellion and as a means of raising money for rebuilding the temple of Jupiter on the Capital in Rome. The temple had burned down in the civil war which accompanied Vespasian's seizure of the purple, and the transfer to Jupiter of funds which had previously been paid by Jews to the Jerusalem Temple was a deliberate symbol of the Jews' defeat. From the start, the tax was collected assiduously, and tax receipts, written on pieces of broken pottery, which have survived in the sands of Egypt, attest that both men and women were required to pay. A state official was specially appointed to supervise collection and, at the local level, designated bureaucrats drew up lists of those liable.

Vespasian and his subordinates evidently assumed that the definition of a Jew was not a problem. For Romans up to and including Vespasian's lifetime, the Jews were a *people* who followed peculiar religious customs: to Cicero, for instance, Jews (like Syrians) were a "nation born to be slaves" (*De Prov. Cons.* 5.10), while the philosopher, Seneca (*On Superstition*, in Augustine, *City of God* 6.11) described Jews as "an accursed race" with foolish customs. The same standard description of Jews was also presupposed by Josephus, when he wrote about the imposition of the same Jewish tax in his *Jewish War* (7.218), which was published in the late seventies or early eighties C.E.: "On the Jews, wherever they might be, he imposed a tax, ordering each of them to pay two drachmas every year to the Capitol." But Josephus, as we have already seen, was at least aware of the possibility of proselytism, although he did not use the term, whereas, in gentile sources, it appears that the ethnic definition was the *only* concept that they had of a Jew. As far as I can tell, there is no unequivocal evidence that any gentile

writer before this time was even aware of the notion that a non-Jew could become a Jew simply by a change of religious allegiance. Silence in this case can be seen as significant. For Greeks and Romans, who had their own distinctive ideas about the function of citizenship in their society and the ways that it could be cautiously extended by the community, Jewish acceptance of outsiders into the body politic simply on the grounds of their adoption of Jewish religious customs was very strange. Furthermore, this silence about proselytes contrasts both with a good deal of amused or angry comment in contemporary sources about the spread of Jewish *practices* among the pagan population — the sabbath was particularly popular — and with the vehemence and frequency of the polemic against conversion to Judaism in Latin literature of the early second century C.E., after the institution of the proselyte had become widely known, for reasons to be examined below.

Such gentile certainties about Jewish identity were shattered through the actions of Domitian, Vespasian's younger son, who became emperor in 81 C.E. According to his biographer, the roman writer Suetonius, whose *Lives of the Caesars* was published in the first half of the second century, Domitian exacted the Jewish tax in a fashion which struck contemporaries as particularly harsh. The passage (*Domitian* 12.2) is worth quoting in full:

Besides other taxes, that on the Jews was levied with the utmost vigour, and those were prosecuted who without publicly acknowledging that faith yet lived as Jews, as well as those who concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people. I recall being present in my youth when a man ninety years old was inspected before the procurator and a very crowded court to see whether he was circumcised.

People were evidently compelled to pay to the *fiscus* even if they lived a Jewish life only in secret — or if they simply, by whatever means, concealed the fact that they had been born Jewish.

The identity of these unfortunates can be surmised with some confidence. They were not gentiles or proselytes, for we are told by the later historian, Cassius Dio (67. 14. 1-3), that non-Jews who “drifted into Jewish ways” were condemned by Domitian either to death or to deprivation of their property. The charge brought against such gentiles (including the consul for the year 95 C.E. and the consul's wife, who was a relative of the emperor) was atheism — that is, refusal to worship pagan gods out of devotion to Judaism — which may provide further confirmation that the category of a Jewish proselyte was not yet known to the Roman state. It can be assumed that Domitian could not impose a tax on such gentiles for behavior which he himself categorised as illegal in Roman law. The people most at issue must, therefore, have been ethnic or born Jews who no longer followed their religion. Hence the plight of the old man whose humiliation was witnessed by the bi-

ographer Suetonius, quoted above. His circumcision was the one sign of his origin that he could not easily efface.

It seems that the suffering of such apostates aroused considerable resentment at Rome and it is not hard to see why. Romans were characteristically tolerant of people from other ethnic origins so long as they assimilated into Roman culture. Many who were born as Jews did precisely that. Most such are now untraceable in the historical record, for they cannot be distinguished from other citizens of the empire, but, since numerous Jews were brought to the capital city as slaves and received Roman citizenship on acquiring freedom, it is likely that a good proportion of the city's population was descended, directly or indirectly, from ethnic Jews. How many of these were compelled by Domitian to pay to the *fiscus Judaicus* is impossible to discover. It would be good to know whether Domitian required both or only one parent to be Jewish to justify ascribing to them a "Jewish origin," but there is no evidence. However, the career of one impressive individual which is comparatively well recorded may illustrate the sort of apostate Jew who was subjected to the humiliation of the tax. Tiberius Iulius Alexander came from a leading wealthy Jewish family in Alexandria and was a nephew of the great Jewish philosopher, Philo. As Josephus noted (*Antiquities* 20. 100), he "did not stand by the practices of his people." Appointed governor of Judaea and, later, prefect of Egypt, he helped the Romans to capture Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and enjoyed high favour with the new dynasty. Men like him would not take kindly to being identified with the defeated and despised nation of the Jews.

The depth of the resentment is evidenced by the actions of the new emperor, Nerva, when Domitian was murdered in 96 C.E. Nerva had connived at, perhaps had a hand in organizing, the assassination. His own right to supreme power was nebulous, and he initiated a series of measures designed to win popularity in Rome. One such measure tackled the problem of the Jewish tax. Coins were issued proclaiming *FISCI IUDAICI CALUMNIA SUBLATA* — "the malicious accusation with regard to the Jewish tax has been removed." The tax itself continued to be collected — it was still being raised in the mid-third century — but it was hoped that it would no longer cause such opposition.

An important reform then — but consisting of what? The literary sources do not state, but it is a reasonable hypothesis that the main thrust was to correct the abuses which had occurred under Domitian. From then on, only those Jews who continued openly in their ancestral practices were liable to the tax: that is, the definition of a Jew was by religion, not race.⁵

One result of this reform — and confirmation of its nature — was

5. I have discussed this more fully in "Nerva, the *Fiscus Judaicus* and Jewish Identity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 79 (1989) (forthcoming).

that the Roman state, and Romans in general, rapidly became aware of the Jewish concept of a proselyte. For writers of the early second century C.E., one of the most objectionable aspects of Jews, on a par with their social isolation, circumcision, and alleged proclivity to lust, was not that the Jews themselves should continue with their peculiar customs — these were at least partially justified in Roman eyes by their antiquity — but that pagans should forsake the old gods in order to become Jews. The Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, quoted by Arrian (*Discourses*, 2.9.20), said in a discourse delivered in c. 108 C.E. that

whenever we see a man halting between two faiths, we are in the habit of saying, "He is not a Jew, he is only acting the part." But when he adopts the attitude of mind of the man who has been baptized [*sic*] and has made his choice, then he both is a Jew in fact and is also called one.

With greater contempt the satirist Juvenal (*Satires* 14. 97-102) castigated proselytes who

worship nothing but the clouds and the divinity of the heavens, and see no difference between eating swine's flesh . . . and that of man, and in time they take to circumcision. Having been wont to flout the laws of Rome, they learned and practice and revere the Jewish law, and all that Moses handed down in his secret tome . . .

The historian Tacitus was most hostile of all in the description of the Jews with which he prefaced his account of the siege of Jerusalem of 70 C.E. He wrote of

those who are converted to their [i.e. the Jews'] ways [that] the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children and brothers as of little account (*Hist.* 5.5).

How did Jews react to this new Roman definition of Jewishness as a religion to which one could convert and from which one could apostatise? The defection of those ethnic Jews who had drifted away from the community must have appeared offensively blatant when it was advertised by public refusal to pay the tax. By contrast, the loyalty of gentiles who chose willingly to define themselves as Jews despite the tax burden must have looked impressive. At any rate, Jews in the Roman empire would no longer remain in as much doubt as the Jews of Antioch in the sixties C.E. about which of the ethnic gentiles who frequented their community reckoned that they belonged fully within it. Those who had accreted to the synagogue could be presumed to think of themselves as proselytes if they paid the two denarii to the *fiscus Judaicus* and gained such subsequent advantages as official permission not to attend pagan cult worship or court cases on the Sabbath. Yet, proselytes undoubtedly existed earlier, and "Godfearers" or "half-Jews" continued even at this time, although without incurring the "Jewish tax" and the benefits that went with it.

Indeed, the most striking innovation which can be dated with some

confidence to this period — the second to early third century C.E. — was a new interest among Jews in defining the role and status (in Jewish eyes) of those gentiles who were perceived as being morally good without having chosen to become Jews. Jewish authors of earlier centuries did refer to gentiles, and it was a commonplace that, at the end of days, gentiles would come to recognize the Jewish God; but, on the position of gentiles in the meantime, little more was said than abomination of the idolatry to which it was assumed that they all subscribed. In the second century C.E. it seems that this lack of concern about gentiles was challenged.

One strand of evidence is to be found in rabbinic texts. The *Tosefta*, compiled in the mid-third century C.E., contains the earliest extant information of an attempt by rabbis of the preceding generations to lay down what behaviour should be demanded in theory from a gentile who wished to remain gentile but still achieve virtue (*Tosefta, Avodah Zarah* 8 (9):4). The Sages of the third century had already agreed that the basic commandments which had been the law for the “sons of Noah” — that is, the ancestors of the Jewish people before Abraham — also applied to contemporary non-Jews, since they, like Noah’s sons, were not bound by the covenant between God and Israel made at Mt. Sinai. The rabbis debated only the precise nature of those commandments, arriving (after much discussion) at the eventual, now standard, list preserved in the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 56a): prohibitions of blasphemy, idolatry, sexual immorality, murder, robbery, eating a portion of a living animal, and a requirement to set up courts of law. It has been argued by some scholars that the idea of these so-called “Noachide Laws” originated not just a generation or so before their first attestation in the third century but many centuries earlier, but this is not very plausible, for they have left no clear trace in the copious Jewish literature of the last centuries B.C.E. and the first century C.E. It seems to me at least as likely that the development of the concept reflected increased Jewish speculation about righteous gentiles as the boundaries between Jew and gentile were clarified in the second century C.E.⁶

A second strand of evidence has a wholly different origin. The recently discovered inscription from the city of Aphrodisias in Caria (in modern Turkey) contains the names of a large number of benefactors of a Jewish institution whose precise nature remains obscure.⁷ The inscription, on two sides of a large stone, was probably set up in the city’s synagogue. According to the editors of the text, the most likely date for its erection was the early third century C.E.. It is a most curious document. On face *a* the names listed are those of Jews; of

6. See D. Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism* (Toronto Studies in Theology, 14, 1983).

7. J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias* (Cambridge Philological Society, Supplementary Volume XI, 1987).

these, three, whose names would otherwise appear to be entirely Jewish, are described on the stone as proselytes. On face *b* still more Jewish names are inscribed, but those are followed by a small gap in the list, under which is found a new heading: "And these are the Godfearers." Below this are written no fewer than fifty-two names, no one of which is Jewish in origin and some of which are positively pagan. Of these individuals, a number are described as city councillors, a rank which would entail participation in the pagan rites of the city for anyone not specifically exempted (as were Jews). It is not going too far to see here the first explicit evidence for Jews giving formal recognition in a religious context to a group of local gentiles whose close relationship with the Jewish community was acknowledged despite their clear determination not to become Jews. One can assume, perhaps, that such public Jewish acknowledgement that gentiles can achieve virtue without conversion to Judaism made all the more secure, in the eyes of other Jews, the Jewishness of those gentiles who nonetheless *preferred* to become proselytes.

Many problems and uncertainties about Jewish identity remained after 96 C.E. Presumably, a gentile who simply started voluntarily paying an annual contribution to the *fiscus Judaicus* but did not change his lifestyle in any other way would not thereby find immediate acceptance as a proselyte if he encountered a rabbi from Galilee. If someone born a Jew managed to escape the attentions of the tax authorities, other Jews might reckon him lucky rather than an apostate. Even if he found it necessary to attend pagan sacrifices to avert suspicion, some might think of him as a bad Jew rather than assume that he had left the faith altogether. But, even if clarity was not achieved after the tax reform by the Roman state in 96 C.E., a change of some sort does seem to have occurred. Jews may still, in practice, have been uncertain in particular cases exactly who was a Jew, but they did become more aware, perhaps for the first time, that they did need to know.

Franz Rosenzweig's Jüdisches Lehrhaus in Frankfurt: A Model of Jewish Adult Education

BRIGITTE KERN-ULMER

IN 1982, A NEW *JÜDISCHES LEHRHAUS* WAS founded in Frankfurt-am-Main, based upon the model of the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* established by Franz Rosenzweig in the 1920s. The new *Lehrhaus*, as well as the original one, were both intended to be places of Jewish adult education. On a global scale, there are literally thousands of Jewish adult education classes being taught today in the Diaspora and in Israel. Most Jews take this for granted and are unaware that organized, systematic Jewish adult education became a reality only seventy years ago. The man most responsible for this educational innovation was Franz Rosenzweig, who directed the *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt-am-Main from 1920 to 1923.

The idea of the *Lehrhaus* can be traced back to Jewish sources, i.e., rabbinic literature (Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash) of the formative period of Judaism. It is based on the notion that the relation of the individual to God should be well-balanced, and that balance is imparted by education and requires a large amount of acquired knowledge. Learning is a lifetime responsibility and is never completed. The education of the human being is an obligation which rests not solely on parents, but, also and in no lesser degree, on the community and, in the highest degree, on the individual. In rabbinic times it was usual that the disciple would help the teacher in solving questions; they studied together at the *beit ha-medrash*, as it is written in the Babylonian Talmud, *Makkot* 10a: "I learned much Torah from my teachers. More than from them I learned from my colleagues and the most I learned from my students." From this statement we may gather that there was more than occasional interaction between teacher and student.

The rabbi as a teacher, the nature of Jewish education, and the place of Jewish study, all came together in the idea of the modern *Lehrhaus*. Rosenzweig always tried to find the relation to life which is determined by the concrete situation of the individual in a particular time and place. He was concerned with the practical aspects of teaching and of studying, and with the different practical aspects of the Law. He could not conceive his Jewishness as the existence of a lonesome

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Jewish thinker; rather, together with the accessible people in his environment, he tried to find a Jewish reality in the community.

In his book, *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig begins with the reality of death, and concludes with the two words, "INTO LIFE." The last sentences of the book are:

To walk humbly with thy God - the words are written over the gate, the gate which leads out of the mysterious-miraculous light of the divine sanctuary in which no man can remain alive. Whither, then, do the wings of the gate open? Thou knowest it not? INTO LIFE.¹

Rosenzweig's concern with the meaning of Jewishness focussed on the problem of Jewish religious education in Germany. Above all, he wanted to be a teacher; to him, the essential task was to combine Torah with life in all of its aspects, and to bring whatever could be taught close to the people. He came to Frankfurt and to the *Lehrhaus* out of his desire to fulfill the ideal of moving the Jewish community INTO LIFE.

In Germany, there had been several antecedents to the *Lehrhaus*, one of the first being the *Samson-Schule* at Wolfenbüttel which had been founded in 1786 and, after 1807, was headed by Rosenzweig's great-grandfather, Samuel Meyer (Ehrenberg). It was here that Leopold Zunz received a large part of his education. At the *Samson-Schule* there had already been a switch in emphasis in the curriculum, where the initial emphasis on Talmudic studies was increasingly supplemented by secular subjects. The school finally became a *Jüdische Realschule* (modern secondary school).²

Another influence on the *Lehrhaus* was the emerging adult education movement, the *Volksch Hochschule*, which first appeared on the German scene prior to World War I. In the Jewish context there was a society for the promotion of the scientific study of Judaism (*Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums*), whose local organization had been founded in Frankfurt in 1902. Also, there was a society for Jewish popular education, (*Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volksbildung e.V.*), established in 1919.³

One of the principal founders of this latter society was Rabbi Georg Salzberger, a liberal Rabbi who had been a Jewish army chaplain in the first World War. As he worked with the Jewish masses he was astonished at their ignorance of Jewish history and religion. He noted that thousands of his Jewish comrades were in dire need of Jewish

1. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, William W. Hallo, tr. (New York, 1970), p. 424.

2. M. Güdemann, "Jüdisches Erziehungs-und Unterrichtswesen in Deutschland," *Encyklopädisches Handbuch der Pädagogik* (Langensalza, n.d.), pp. 1-12.

3. P. Arnsberg, *Die Geschichte der Frankfurter Juden seit der Französischen Revolution*, Vols. 1-3 (Darmstadt, 1983).

education and concluded that he had “to take a decisive step towards Jewish adult education.”⁴

Also, in 1919, another Jewish adult education institution was established in Berlin and Breslau, called *Freie Jüdische Volkshochschule*. Rosenzweig says of it:

During my stay in Berlin, I collected some information about the *Jüdische Volkshochschule*. What I was told about its decline has strengthened my opinion that things cannot be worked out relying solely on the system in Berlin...the purpose of the university is to spread knowledge and to accustom one to independent thinking. The principal purpose of our “college for adult education” (*Volkshochschule*) should be to decrease ignorance and to disaccustom people from a lack of interest.⁵

Within this context of a movement for popular adult education, the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* emerged. The idea for it should become clear when we glance at the situation of the Jews in Germany just after World War I. Under the Weimar Republic, German Jews, as a religious community, achieved equality with the Christian community in regard to the collection of taxes for their own purposes. Diachronically, this could be seen as the completion of the German Jewish emancipation. At the same time, there was a noticeable increase of ignorance among Jews regarding their own tradition (with the exception of a few scholars and people who engaged in congregational religious life). This was especially evident in Frankfurt-am-Main, a place where a rich Jewish tradition had previously existed.

After a visit to Frankfurt in 1919, Rosenzweig wrote a paper, “*Bildung und kein Ende*,”⁶ which contained both a criticism of the educational situation after Mendelssohn and Zunz and an outline of a meaningful Jewish life. He objected to the attempt of German neo-Orthodoxy to combine the study of Torah with general education (*Derekh Erez*) which was based upon Samson Raphael Hirsch and his interpretation of a passage in *Pirke Avot*: 2.2. For Hirsch, the paradigm was an equal balance of acquired knowledge in both European culture and Judaism. For Rosenzweig, the ideal was for one’s cultural knowledge to be centered upon Judaism, while European culture would have its place at the periphery.

The society for Jewish popular education in Frankfurt summoned

4. G. Salzberger, *Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen: Die Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volksbildung und das Jüdische Lehrhaus*, in A.H. Friedlander, *Georg Salzberger, Leben und Lehre* (Frankfurt a.M., 1982), pp. 97-108, p. 98.

5. R. Rosenzweig and E. Rosenzweig-Scheinmann, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig, Briefe und Tagebücher* (The Hague, 1979), Vol. 2, 1918-1929. A letter to Eugen Mayer, 12 March, 1920.

6. F. Rosenzweig, “*Bildung und kein Ende*” (*Pred.12, 12*), in *Zur jüdischen Erziehung, Drei Sendschreiben* (Berlin, 1937), and F. Rosenzweig, *Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin, 1937), pp.79-93. See also, N. Glatzer, ed., *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and His Thought*, “On Being a Jewish Person,” C. Greenberg, tr., pp. 214-227.

Rosenzweig to their city and, in August of 1920, appointed him head of the *Lehrhaus*. The society can be considered the predecessor of the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus*, and its organizational structure became one of the models of the *Lehrhaus*. Rosenzweig was aware that the Frankfurt Jewish community was fragmented into different groups, and he tried to convince them to cooperate in a broadly conceived and extensive educational program which relied partly upon previous innovations in Jewish education in Germany and, in part, on some novel ideas of his own.

He had in view a complete reorganization of Jewish education on all levels and a reassessment of the conception of Jewish scholarship in Europe. In his paper, "*Zeit ist's*" (It is Time),⁷ which is an open letter to Hermann Cohen, written from the war zone in March, 1917, Rosenzweig outlined a detailed plan for the role of the Jewish scholar. The purely academic role, such as was found in the *Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin, was no longer acceptable. Instead, the ideal for Rosenzweig was the individual who engaged in scientific inquiry only on a part-time basis; another part of his time the scholar should devote to teaching for the benefit of the local Jewish community. Furthermore, scholarly research was to be more concerned with contemporary Jewish life. Also, the youth in the schools should not be taught by overworked rabbis, but, rather, by competent scholars.

Rosenzweig aspired to revive the Jewish intelligentsia through the creation of scholar-teachers who would reach the alienated lay members of the community. He thought that the traditional method of study of the yeshivah had resulted only in isolating the Orthodox from the rest of the Jewish community, while the progressive movement was only partially successful in reaching the Jewish community. The majority of Jews appeared to be alienated from Judaism. Rosenzweig described them as Jews with "a mere Yom Kippur Jewishness,"⁸ and he directed his attention to this alienated majority in order to encourage them to reclaim their culture, religion and tradition.

"*Zeit ist's*" also contained a proposal for a revised curriculum for Jewish studies in Germany. During the nine years of required religious study at the *Gymnasium*, students should concentrate on the Hebrew language, the Bible, some rabbinic texts, and Jewish philosophy and history. It is interesting to note that the major point of *Zeit ist's*, the creation of a teaching-scholar, was strongly opposed by both Jewish scholars and teachers within Germany. In addition, Rosenzweig had worked out a detailed program for the reform of the German school system in general. His orientation was extremely humanistic and universalistic in respect to German general education, and he was sharply critical of the trends that German culture and education had taken

7. F. Rosenzweig, "*Zeit ist's* (Ps 119, 126)," *Kleine Schriften*, pp. 56-78.

8. F. Rosenzweig, "On Being a Jewish Person," in *Bildung und kein Ende*, p. 220.

in the preceding generations. He believed that there was an overemphasis on specialization in German education and on the denominational and cultural differences of the students. He hoped that a culturally unified Europe would come into existence after the peace treaty, and he entitled his plan for the reform of German education, a "Central European Educational Program for Germany."

Rosenzweig had a new ideal of *Bildung*, acquired knowledge. One key aspect of it was that the living, spoken word was to replace the written one. The world of academia, of scholarship for its own sake, no longer interested Rosenzweig. As a Hegelian philosopher, he was offered a lectureship at the University of Berlin, but rejected it since he wanted to serve human beings, rather than devote his energies to intellectual abstractions. For him, scientific curiosity and the insatiable appetite for knowledge belonged to the past. On this subject of the past, he wrote:

There is no end to the exploration of the past, the exploration to which even the moment is invalid unless it has been pinned into the butterfly collector's showcase of past things, and which only wants to know about the future what it can imagine on the basis of an image of the past.⁹

Rosenzweig no longer could find sufficient fulfillment in the "making of books" (*Büchermachen*) or the "reading of books" (*Bücherlesen*). According to him, the scholarship of books cannot revive knowledge and teaching; only life itself has this potential.

For Rosenzweig, the catalyst to the revival of knowledge and teaching was the human power to speak and to communicate. In his essay, "The New Thinking",¹⁰ he writes that the method of speech replaces the method of conceptual thought. Abstract thought is a solitary experience, while, in discourse, an interaction takes place. An abstract thinker knows his thoughts in advance. The "speaking thinker" cannot completely anticipate the thoughts of the other speakers; he must be able to wait because he depends upon their words.

Rosenzweig believes that this manner of thinking is really the Jewish method in that it relies upon an actual, living situation in which spoken words are exchanged. This conversation constitutes a true learning experience. It takes place over a period of time and requires each speaker to wait and respond to the other. This "New Thinking" was based in part on Rosenzweig's conception of the learning methods used in the *beit ha-medrash* during rabbinic times.

The name, *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* (Free House of Jewish Studies), was intentionally chosen because it would become a modernized *beit ha-medrash*. The word "Free" meant free access and free discussions, which should renew the spirit of Jewish learning.

9. F. Rosenzweig, "*Bildung und kein Ende*."

10. F. Rosenzweig, "The New Thinking," in N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig*, pp.190-208.

Thus, the Jewish movement for a popular adult education would try to fill the gap in Jewish matters concerning *Bildung* and to make up for that which had been neglected in Jewish religious instruction and what the university could not offer. It should offer an extensive system of courses, "a curriculum of a possibly encyclopedic character, in short, *Bildung*."¹¹ This modernized *beit ha-medrash* was anticipated as a form of Jewish life, which provides a space for speaking (*Sprechraum*) and a time for speaking (*Sprechzeit*).

In such a conceptualized system, listening would be made possible. From the act of "listening" words would come forth which would grow and unite into what Rosenzweig calls "wishes." The word "wishes," as used by Rosenzweig, is vague and may mean "intentionality."

The appropriate instructor would be simultaneously teacher and disciple, in the sense that he, too, should be able to "wish." This teacher should be at the same place as his students. The time set apart for speaking should be open to the public. Unlike a lecture at the university which realizes the intention of only a single person, here it is important to join in discussion, since here human beings should be brought together who are supposed to develop a common quality of *liveliness*. Ernst Simon, the historian and pedagogue, later wrote about the critical interaction between the teacher and the student that it was "...the first time in the history of Judaism that the Rav was sitting on the same bench as the *Am-Ha'aretz*, not only in order to hear, in order to learn, no, but also as instructor."¹² This led to the somewhat paradoxical situation that the learning process followed the principle of making teachers into disciples and *vice versa*. In Rosenzweig's time this was a completely new concept, and this was exactly what he had in mind when he spoke about teachers being "conductors in the choir of questioners."¹³

Rosenzweig was proud of the fact that the majority of the faculty of the *Lehrhaus* had not been formally trained in Jewish studies. He commented upon this in the convocation address at the opening of the *Lehrhaus* on the 17th of October 1920:

It should suffice to gather together people of every origin, teachers as well as pupils. Just look at our program! You will find there as lecturers a chemist, a physician, a historian, an artist, a politician. Obviously, two thirds of the teachers are of such a kind that they would have been denied the privilege of teaching in a Jewish house of learning twenty or thirty years ago — the only period when Jewish learning had become a matter of experts. They have come together here not as experts, but as Jews.¹⁴

11. F. Rosenzweig, "*Bildung und kein Ende*."

12. E. Simon, "*Franz Rosenzweig und das jüdische Bildungsproblem*" (1931), in *Brücken, Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Heidelberg, 1965), p. 399.

13. F. Rosenzweig, "*Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus. Einleitung für ein Mitteilungsblatt*" (1925), in *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 101.

14. F. Rosenzweig, *A New Learning*, Werner J. Cahnmann, tr. and ed., repr. from the *Chicago Jewish Forum*, Vol. I, no. 3, Spring 1943. "Rosenzweig's address," p. 59.

For Rosenzweig it was a necessity and an opportunity to deal with those Jews who had been estranged and alienated from Judaism. The *heder*, the yeshivah, and the synagogue no longer met their needs. The price of emancipation and assimilation was to transform many Jewish intellectuals from *talmidei hakhamim* into the scholars and scientists of our modern universities. In that same opening address Rosenzweig said:

All this gives us a new strength and a new claim. A new learning comes into being or, rather, has already come into being. It is a learning in a reversed direction, a learning no more from the Torah into life, but from life, from a world that does not know or pretends not to know any more about the "Law," back to the Torah. This is the mark of our time.

We move from the periphery to the core, from "*without*" to "*within!*" This, indeed, is a new learning. It is a learning for which those are most capable who carry with them the greatest amount of foreign goods. These, then, are explicitly not the experts of Jewishness... but as children of estrangement who want to return home and who surely will return in the end.¹⁵

The theme of moving from the *periphery to the center* is one way of looking at the curriculum of the *Lehrhaus*. For Rosenzweig, the "core," the "center" of Judaism could be found by studying Hebrew texts and the Hebrew language. Although he later collaborated with Martin Buber to translate the *Tanakh* into German, Rosenzweig was personally convinced that German was, in reality, a Christian language.*

In his search for a new approach to the study of the Bible, his goal was not the critical examination of the various sources of the text, but, rather, to understand the impact which the same text had had on different readers throughout Jewish history. In modern literary criticism, this concept is called *Rezeptionsaesthetik*, the aesthetics of reception.

The difficulty of the Hebrew language for the students of the *Lehrhaus* was apparent to Rosenzweig, and in a letter to Rudolf Hallo (Dec. 1922), who later became his successor at the *Lehrhaus*, he wrote:

I was glad that Agnon could be prevailed on to read some of his own things from a collection of stories, like "The Legend of the Scribe," and discuss them afterwards in Hebrew... It became clear at the lecture that no one could speak Hebrew, though everyone pretended to be able to. Consequently no one spoke.¹⁶

The inevitable Jewish clash with modernity was illustrated by the fact that neither Rosenzweig nor the other leaders of the *Lehrhaus* could agree on how a *Lehrhaus* publication should be dated. Rosenzweig refused to permit the Christian date of *anno domini*, while others believed that the Hebrew calendar was unfamiliar and confusing. As a compro-

15. Cf. n. 14

*In my opinion, the Buber-Rosenzweig translation cannot be completely understood by the reader without an antecedent knowledge of Hebrew.

16. N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 118.

mise, no year was listed on the programs, but the academic sessions were numbered in sequence.

Rosenzweig's programs ¹⁷ for the *Lehrhaus*, which he composed during the short time he was its head — from the autumn of 1920 until the spring of 1923 — are indicative of his thinking and were a binding directive for any future *Lehrhaus* activity.

His first division of the program (1920) was into classical, historical and modern, which he used when he lectured in the first trimester about the types of Judaism and post-emancipatory psychology. The title of the lecture series was "The Jewish Man" (*Der Jüdische Mensch*), in which he discussed "The Heirs to History," where he spoke of, first, "The Skeptic and the Pious;" second, "The Children of the Time," subdivided into "The Revolutionary," "The Aristocrat," "The Faithful," "The Apostate," "The Gifted," and "The Simple-Minded;" and, third, "The Planters of the Future," referring to "The One Who Comes Home" and "The Prophet." In the second trimester Rosenzweig lead a course that was a critical discussion of the major streams of German idealistic philosophy. This course, together with a seminar, was the basis for his booklet, "Understanding the Sick and the Healthy."¹⁸ In the third trimester he dealt critically with Hermann Cohen's *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*.

Rosenzweig was not quite satisfied with the *Lehrhaus* of the first year, having expected a more favorable reaction to it. Nevertheless, the *Lehrhaus* as an institution grew steadily and its expansion enabled it to strive for financial independence.

It was Rosenzweig's conception that the variety of courses offered by the *Lehrhaus* should comprise a unified approach to Judaism. He was not quite successful as far as his own lectures were concerned, because the audiences conceived of them as being on too high a level of understanding, which they did not share. In December 1922 he wrote to Rudolf Hallo:

My own lectures attracted many people in the beginning... they were curious about me and they were greatly disappointed. My lecturing in Frankfurt was a failure... I simply was not what they call in Frankfurt a "good lecturer."¹⁹

In order to increase the attendance at the *Lehrhaus*, Rosenzweig utilized a series of "Big Lectures," in the hope that some of the curious

17. R. Koch, "Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus," *Der Jude*, 7 (1923): 116-125; N. Glatzer, "The Frankfurt Lehrhaus," in N. Glatzer, *Essays in Jewish Thought* (Alabama, 1978), pp. 254-273; the programs of the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus*.

18. F. Rosenzweig, *Das Büchlein vom gesunden und kranken Menschenverstand*, ed. N. Glatzer, (Königstein/Ts, 1984).

19. R. Rosenzweig and E. Rosenzweig-Scheinmann, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig, Briefe und Tagebuch*, Vol. 2, p. 857.

students would switch from a passive role to that of participating more actively in smaller classes. He explained his reasoning as follows:

Now to the problem of the big lectures. They are the necessary beginning . . . Of course it must not be the ultimate aim; the way must be opened to questioning and study. It is also natural that those who have just learned to question look with contempt on the mere gapers, just as those who have newly embarked on study do on the enthusiastic questioners. Yet none of the three functions should ever cease entirely. Even he who is deeply engrossed in study must not forget how to question and wonder . . .²⁰

The end of December 1921 had seen a reunion of Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, who was attracted by the *Lehrhaus* method, which enabled him to establish an intellectual dialogue between lecturer and student. There was, at the time, no other forum that offered such an opportunity to a man who cultivated the art of dialogue as much as he did. Buber was then actually writing his book, *I and Thou*²¹, which became the basis for his *Lehrhaus* lectures. He criticized all attempts to reduce religion to a mere concept on the level of philosophical abstraction. Religion, he said, served two purposes: as a cultural function and as an opportunity for individual self-expression. According to Buber, religion should be something that gives one a direction in life. This opinion he put to use in the *Lehrhaus* while teaching about Hasidim and other Hebrew texts. He obviously enjoyed his experiences there and, later, he told a group of Zionists that the *Lehrhaus* was the only distinguished cultural institution in all of Western Jewry.²²

In 1923, the *Lehrhaus* had 1,100 students. One should remember that the Frankfurt Jewish community then had about 30,000 people in it. By then, because of his increasing disabilities—he suffered from progressive paralysis—Rosenzweig could no longer teach at the *Lehrhaus*, and he appointed Rudolf Hallo as his successor.

In the sixth year (1924/25), discussion groups about the problems of the Jewish situation in the modern world were organized. Rosenzweig, who at this point had lost the power of speech, was kept informed of these meetings. The study groups continued for several years, even though public interest in the *Lehrhaus* had considerably diminished. The curious students had disappeared, which led to a worsening of the financial situation of the institution.

From 1920 until 1926 there were about ninety lectures and 180 study groups. After Rosenzweig died on December 12th, 1929, the *Lehrhaus* no longer publicly functioned, though a *Lehrhaus* group met once a year on his *Jahrzeit* for an hour of study. There were, however, a number of institutions called *Lehrhaus* in other German cities.

20. Ibid., "A letter to Rudolf Stahl, 1 December, 1923."

21. M. Buber, "Ich und Du" in *Werke* (Munich, 1962), vol. 2.

22. N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 117.

After Hitler's rise to power, the *Lehrhaus* was closed down. It was re-opened by Buber on November 19th, 1933, when he explicitly referred to an important theme of Rosenzweig's *Lehrhaus*, which was to adjust to the particular demands of the time. The inauguration was initiated by the *Mittelstelle für Jüdische Erwachsenenbildung* (Office for the combined efforts towards Jewish adult education), and at the re-opening ceremony Buber spoke about the tasks of Jewish education:

A real *Lehrhaus* is a part of popular education, but only a part of it. For a true popular education, teaching and life must be combined. . . . Affliction has laid its hand upon us and has turned the faces of all to whom it is necessary toward Judaism. Now, it is crucial that we truly pursue the way of Judaism with our turned faces. Affliction has always had an awakening strength in our history. To start out with affliction and compulsion is not the worst. It is crucial that we turn this into freedom and a blessing.²³

From then on, lectures were supervised by the Gestapo,²⁴ and lecturers were forced to hand in their manuscripts in order to have them censored by the German authorities. The events of the following years put a sudden, bitter end to the rich, humanistic tradition of Frankfurt Jewry and the *Lehrhaus*.

It was not until the 1950s that a *Jüdisches Lehrhaus* was founded once again by the charismatic Hermann Levin Goldschmidt. It existed in Zurich from 1951-1961, and reflected the experiences of the Holocaust. The charter stated:

Outset: we ourselves are the outset, we are the bearers of our tradition, beyond any faction and border; we together are the family members of our murdered victims; we together prepare the way for our successors. . . .²⁵

This statement included an assertion that only the fulfillment of the particularity of the Jewish people could bring about the "universal day of peace," as Goldschmidt called it.

Goldschmidt's *Lehrhaus* was conceptionally linked to the former Frankfurt *Lehrhaus* by the notion of new learning which, according to Goldschmidt, demanded a reappraisal and an acceptance of that which had been true in the past. This truth lies neither in Orthodoxy nor in liberal Judaism nor in Zionism; rather, it can be located in what he calls "an acceptance of the whole of Judaism, with all its trends which emerged at different times. . . . each of which had been affirmed, where it had made its contribution, and where it remained irreplaceable."²⁶ This probably led to a comparison of his own activity and the concept

23. M. Buber, "Programmerklärung des Frankfurter Jüdischen Lehrhauses" in *Der Jude und sein Judentum, Gesammelte Aufsätze und Reden* (Cologne, 1963), pp. 603ff.

24. Personal correspondence with Wolf Matzdorff, Jerusalem, who taught at the *Lehrhaus*.

25. *Jüdisches Lehrhaus*, Zürich, *Jahresberichte* (Zürich 1953 and 1958).

26. H. L. Goldschmidt, "Vom Lehrhaus," in *Die Botschaft des Judentums* (Frankfurt a.M., 1960), p. 197.

of the *Lehrhaus* to the work of the Rabbis, as he explained in the following:

What a satisfaction it is, instead of following the creators of the Talmud by the acceptance of their work, to stand side by side with them, creatively to effect new things, like them, by acceptance of the same tasks, which in their case led to the Talmud!²⁷

Thus, his main concern seemed to be the applicability of Jewish thought to modern life.

Goldschmidt understood the legacy of Judaism in a uniquely particularistic fashion; the legacy was the lasting value of the achievements of German Jewry. In order to pursue his aims he designed a Jewish text-book²⁸ which was to contain portions of the major writings of Judaism of modern times, e.g., from the works of Mendelssohn, Geiger, Graetz, Hirsch, Pinsker, Herzl, Rosenzweig, Th. Lessing, and M. Susmann. In addition, the Zurich *Lehrhaus* had classes on Jewish writers from Heine to Kafka, philosophy out of the sources of Judaism, including Bible, the Talmud and progressive thought, and close readings of Spinoza. Out of the first seven years, with 35 courses and with 365 enrolled students, Goldschmidt developed his book, *Das Vermächtnis des deutschen Judentums*.²⁹ The educational work was limited to Goldschmidt himself, who worked without pay but with distinct charisma.

In addition to the Zurich *Lehrhaus*, one should mention that there is a Buber Adult Education Center in Jerusalem. Although the *Lehrhaus* of Rosenzweig and Buber has received relatively little attention within Jewish circles, the conception of the *Lehrhaus* and the so-called dialogical principle has received great attention in certain Christian circles that pursue the indefinable type of a *weltanschaulich* discourse. A *Lehrhaus* still exists in the Netherlands, where director Max Hamburger³⁰ offers courses similar to those of the revived *Lehrhaus* of Frankfurt, which will be mentioned shortly. Apart from this, there are many (Christian) study groups — especially in the Netherlands — who prefer to call themselves *Lehrhaus*.

The problem which Rosenzweig confronted in his time exists now in Germany after the Holocaust. For example, the perpetual question of Jewish identity and the all-too-frequent ignorance of Jewish tradition are continuing for the Jews in Germany. However, unlike Rosenzweig's era, the old tendencies towards assimilation have recently been replaced, to some extent, by a tendency towards Jewish separatism in the Federal Republic. For example, today there are many Jews in Frankfurt who have lost their self-consciousness about being Jewish. Today there is

27. Ibid., p. 215.

28. H. L. Goldschmidt, *Das Vermächtnis des deutschen Judentums* (Frankfurt a.M., 1964).

29. Ibid.

30. W. Licharz, ed., *Lernen und Lehren im Jüdischen Lehrhaus* (Frankfurt a.M., 1985).

a need in Germany to respond actively to tradition and not merely react to it as a museum artifact.

Rosenzweig's idea of Jewish adult education was revived in Frankfurt in 1982 by scholars and students of Jewish studies³¹ who founded a new *Lehrhaus*. The so-called *Arbeitskreis Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt am-Main e.V. started to function in imitation of the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus*. Its approach is to deal with Judaism in its broadest sense, including all its phenomena, beyond the Holocaust and the role of Israel. The first priority of the *Lehrhaus* of today is to educate Jews in Jewish life and thought, and its aim is contrary to the expectation of German gentiles, who desire that Jews educate the gentiles in respect to Judaism. With a touch of sarcasm it is contended that there is a new occupation in Germany, that of being a professional Jew who is required to respond informatively and definitively to all questions which, in some manner, are related to Judaism — including historical events, Israel's foreign policy, and halakhic and philosophical problems. Most Germans seem to believe that if someone is Jewish, he is able to fulfill all of these demands. This leads to the exposure of certain Jews in Germany who are perceived by the gentile community as representatives of Judaism. This exposure in its extreme form results in the "zoo" effect which occurs when Jews are watched and studied as part of a dying species.

Jews in Europe perceive themselves as a community of sufferers. The young French philosopher, Alain Finkielkraut, expresses this idea in the following words:

I have lived (and I still live) surrounded by absentees, whose disappearance has raised my value without having caused me any suffering.³²

If Rosenzweig's intentions were to deal with the consequences of the assimilatory process of German Jewry, then the *Lehrhaus* of today deals with the situation of living in an empty space (vacuum) of Jewish life in the Federal Republic. This vacuum produces tendencies toward establishing a museum of Judaism instead of a redevelopment of Jewish life.

The conflict of Jews in Germany today is that they are criticized by Israelis and Diaspora Jews for living in the country of the murderers, while German Jews feel that they are disliked by the great majority of the population. They are aware of a continuation of deeply-rooted anti-Semitism from the left and the right, although the greatest part of the country's population was born after 1945 and has had no personal contact with Jews. However, most Jews in Germany no longer sit "on

31. A few lectures were published in B. Kern, ed., *Diskussionsbeiträge aus dem Jüdischen Lehrhaus in Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt a.M., 1986). About the *Lehrhaus* see B. Kern, "Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus 1920 - Jüdisches Lehrhaus 1986", in *Juden in Kassel 1808-1933: Eine Dokumentation anlässlich des 100. Geburtstages von Franz Rosenzweig* (Kassel, 1986), pp. 119-126.

32. A. Finkielkraut, *Der eingebildete Jude* (Munich, 1982), p. 20.

their packed suitcases” as they used to do in the 1950s, when they felt that they were living in a rapidly diminishing community of stranded people.

In the Federal Republic of Germany there are about 27,500, mostly elderly, Jews, comprising about 0.05% of the population, living mainly in the major cities like Frankfurt. It should be noted that there is no *mohel* in all of Germany. Thus, there is the amazing phenomenon which Henryk Broder mentions, that there is anti-Semitism without Jews.³³

The inadequate persecution of Nazi crimes, combined with the early success of the National Democratic Party (NPD) and the frequent vandalism against Jewish institutions, creates a permanent feeling of unease for Jews. In addition, they are the targets of anti-Israeli terrorist actions.

Within German Jewry there are two opposing positions of how to deal with their situation. One view is expressed by an Israeli born psychologist who lives in Frankfurt and claims that, “if I leave Germany, Hitler will have won completely.”³⁴ The opposite view is stated by Lea Fleischmann, a German-born Jew, now living in Israel, whose view of Germany is revealed in the title of her popular book, *Dies ist nicht mein Land* (This is Not My Country).³⁵

The new *Lehrhaus* is often compelled to cope with the psychologically complex situation of German Jewry.³⁶ Defining a new Jewish identity is one of its main themes. This identity crisis is also due to the fact that there is a remoteness from tradition, not only from the classical sources of Judaism, but, also, from liberal and conservative German Judaism. Most of the Jews in Germany today are descendants of East European Jews who were left in the DP camps after World War II. Only about 10% are descendants of German Jews. Though Jewish congregations in Germany are structured according to halakhic principles, the majority of their membership is not Orthodox in practice. In fact, among German Jews there is a tendency to progressive secularization and, even, animosity towards religion.

Given the above conditions, the underlying conception of today's *Lehrhaus* is based upon an attempt to accommodate the original conceptions of Rosenzweig while at the same time reconciling them with the circumstances of post-war Jewry in Germany. Only time will tell whether this attempt will be successful.

33. H. H. Broder, *Der ewige Antisemit, Über Sinn und Funktion eines beständigen Gefühls* (Frankfurt a.M., 1986) [This book was censored].

34. S. Speier, “Von der Pubertät zum Erwachsenendasein — Bericht einer Bewusstwerdung,” in M. Brumlik, D. Kiesel, C. Kugelman, J.H. Schoeps, eds., *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945* (Frankfurt a.M., 1986), pp. 182-194.

35. L. Fleischmann, *Dies ist nicht mein Land: Eine Jüdin verlässt die Bundesrepublik* (Hamburg, 1980).

36. P. Sichrowsky, ed., *Wir wissen nicht, was Morgen wird, wir wissen wohl, was Gestern war: Junge Juden in Deutschland und Österreich* (Cologne, 1985).

Faith, Fiction and the Jewish Scriptures

BEREL DOV LERNER

MY SIX YEAR OLD SON, TZVI, IS PRECOCIOUSLY sensitive to the complexities of narrative truth. Once, after I related to him in Hebrew a conversation from my childhood, he exclaimed: "That can't be right, you've got everyone speaking Hebrew, but in America people speak English." I hope that no one else takes similar offense at my having translated his Hebrew for quotation in an English language publication. More seriously, he was also asking a question which has, no doubt, thrown many a parent into a fit of soul-searching unknown since adolescence. The question is: "Are the stories of the Bible true?"

Personal beliefs aside, it is clear that the traditional Jewish consensus answers with a resounding "yes." Surprisingly, there is one narrative book in Jewish Scripture whose traditional status is unclear. I refer to the book of Job.

The concluding pages of the first chapter of the Talmudic tractate, *Bava Batra*, contain a relatively long and sustained discussion of Job. In the course of the Talmud's attempt to establish the time and authorship of the book, the following incident is recounted:

A certain one of the Rabbis came before Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani and sat down and said: "Job did not exist and was never created, rather he was [a character in] a fable" (*B. Bava Batra* 15a).

While R. Shmuel bar Nahmani argues against this view, it has certainly found its supporters among later authorities. In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides clearly states that the story of Job "is a parable intended to set forth the opinions of people concerning providence."¹ More recently, the prominent Orthodox Israeli exegete, Amos Haḥam, has stated that "all of the contemporary commentators agree that Job is a parable."²

The fact that Job was not thought of as literally true tells us something important about the rabbinic attitude towards Scripture as a whole. The Rabbis did not adopt a "fundamentalist" view of scriptural truth, requiring that Scripture qua Scripture be historically accurate. Given, then, the flexibility of rabbinic thought, we may reasonably ask why the rest of the Bible's stories were (almost) always thought of by classical Judaism as accurately describing past events.

1. *Guide to the Perplexed*, Pines, tr., III:22, p. 486.

2. *Sefer Iyyov* (*Da'at Mikra* series, Jerusalem, 1970), Introduction, p. 19.

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Some texts lose none of their importance if read as fiction. It makes little difference to the reader that Madam Bovary never existed. But, suppose one read such things about one's own spouse! Then the accuracy of every detail might seem more crucial. Most of the stories of the Jewish Scriptures belong to the second category of texts. When the Book of Exodus retells the story of Israel in Egypt, its self-conscious purpose is to establish the historical basis of God's special dominion over the Jewish people, as expressed in the first of the Ten Commandments. The covenant between God and His people partakes of the formal aspect of a legal contract, and the believing reader (and this is the only reader taken into consideration by the Torah) consults Scripture as an accurate record of each party's compliance with the contract. If the Exodus were considered a myth, the entire material basis of the covenant between God and Israel would collapse.

There is also a deeper, *epistemological* issue at stake here. In the Torah, Moses repeatedly urges his audience to accept the evidence of their own eyes, to remember the miracles performed for them.

You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles (Deut. 29:1,2).

Why call upon the people to remember events unless they were supposed to have actually taken place? Moses calls upon them not to worship images, since "you saw no manner of form on the day that the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire" (Deut. 4:15). What sense can be made of such an appeal if it is not understood as pointing to a real experience of theophany at Sinai?

All of this leads to what must be, for the secular reader, the great paradox of the Bible's place in the development of human consciousness. On the one hand, the Bible promotes an anti-mythical, almost empiricist view of the world. As a modern philosopher might say, the myths of pagan religion were unverifiable. Human experience could offer no evidence for or against the truth of mytho-poetic entities. Yet, the Bible takes religion seriously and seeks to apply to it the same standards of credibility which are used in every day life. The paganism of ancient times failed the Biblical test. The Canaanite gods did not answer human prayers in a regular fashion; neither did they punish the wicked nor reward the just. Attacking idolatry in terms of an almost vulgar positivism, the prophets deride the "holy" images of competing religions as the lifeless artifacts of a preposterous superstition.

On the other hand, the Bible replaces the rejected pagan myths with new, equally incredible tales of Divine intervention in the mainstream of ancient history. Of course, these stories describe exactly the kinds of events which could serve as empirically valid evidence for the truth of Judaism. But those who reject the truth of Scripture must ask,

how did it come to pass that the same prophets who introduced a critical attitude towards the Divine were also the promoters of this new, fantastic mythology? To make matters worse, this new mythology is presented against the backdrop of an astonishingly naturalistic historical narrative. The Jewish people and its greatest leaders are repeatedly subjected to bitter criticism consistent with the muck-raking style of Scripture's attack on paganism. This practice of honest self-appraisal was quite unheard of in the literary traditions of Israel's ancient neighbors. The result is a kind of "warts and wonders and all" account of covenantal history. Why embellish mere myths with such painfully realistic detail?

The tension between miraculous events and the critical Biblical outlook reaches its height in the story of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal. According to the story in the First Book of Kings, Elijah assembled the entire Jewish nation at Mount Carmel in order to witness a daring experiment. He was to prepare a sacrifice to God, while four-hundred and fifty prophets of Baal made ready an offering to their deity. The point was to see which god would demonstrate his reality and power by sending down fire from heaven to consume his particular sacrifice. The prophets of Baal went first. During the performance of their rites, Elijah baited them: "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is musing or he is easing himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be wakened" (I Kings 18:27).

Elijah's contempt for the Baal worshipers was typical of the critical prophetic stance. He took Canaanite paganism *as a religion* about as seriously as a modern Westerner might take the native cults of Africa or the Pacific Islands. One might even say that, by today's standards, Elijah's intemperate positivism seems somewhat old-fashioned. His disdain for the supernatural is more appropriate to the French Enlightenment than to late twentieth century "New-Age" thinking.

Yet Elijah's experiment did not end by merely refuting superstition. The prophet went on to repair God's broken altar, prepare the sacrifice, and have it all repeatedly doused with water until the surrounding ditch was also filled. After Elijah pronounced a short prayer, fire came down from heaven, consuming the offering — altar stones, water and all.

What are we to make of the conclusion of this story? After arousing in the reader a feeling of shared intellectual superiority — we join Elijah in scoffing at the ineffectiveness of the Baal worshipers' primitive rites — it goes on to describe the most incredible wonder performed by the God of Israel before the massed audience of his wayward people. As usual, the skeptical reader is left in a quandary. But one thing is clear; this story was meant to be taken in dead earnest and any attempt to soften its claims by a metaphorical interpretation will undo its basic intention. The point of the story is that the true God of Israel can do what the mythological Baal cannot. Neither can we dismiss the de-

scription of Elijah's miracle as the product of an uncritical mytho-poetic imagination. By holding the claims of idolatry to the standards of everyday reality, Elijah overthrows mytho-poetic thought. If it did not really take place, the story tells us nothing.

If Scripture's mixture of common-sense empiricism and tales of God's wonders is confusing to the nonbeliever, it is downright exasperating to the believer. The great challenge of the Bible to contemporary Judaism is how to remain loyal to the critical spirit of the prophets and still keep faith with God in a world that has not known His direct intervention for quite some time. Would the generation that "feared the Lord and believed in the Lord, and in his servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31) after witnessing the splitting of the Red Sea have gained this faith in the century of the Holocaust?

The most typically modern answer to this problem is to take the Existentialist's "leap of faith", a freely made decision to accept the truth of religion without regard for objective reason. Satisfying as such fideism may be to religious sentiment, nothing could be more foreign to Biblical (and most post-Biblical) Jewish thinking. Whether or not we accept the Exodus as historical fact, the Jews of Biblical times most certainly did. To pledge allegiance to a God who has miraculously freed you from centuries of repressive slavery hardly requires a leap of faith!

In its complete form, the existentialist argument extends beyond questions of faith to questions of works. God's *mizvot* become the absurd commands of the Lord of Kierkegaard, a deity as far removed from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as is the God of the philosophers. The non-believer has his own version of fideism, exchanging Judaism's Moshe Rabbeinu for a Nietzschean super-man who imposed a new table of values upon his people through sheer force of will. These views have become so popular that even people who should know better interpret Scripture by their lights. Contrasting Enlightenment political thought with the Torah, Allan Bloom writes:

Such imperatives are the very opposite extreme from those enunciated in the Ten Commandments, which provide no reasons for obeying their injunctions and do not affirm fundamental passions but inhibit them.³

Of course, this is sheer nonsense. As in matters of faith, Scripture takes a reasonable attitude towards matters of law. In the first place, it must be recalled that, to Biblical thinking, Divine Providence was a very real factor worth taking into account by those who sought to satisfy their "fundamental passions." The commandment to "Honor thy father and thy mother" was tied by Divine promise to the very real "passion" for long life — "that thy days may be prolonged" (Deut. 5:16). Secondly, no philosophical consequences may be deduced from the fact that the Ten Commandments provide no explanations of the social and political benefits which their observance will incur. Indeed, we do not

3. *Closing of the American Mind* (New York, 1987), p. 288.

always expect such explanations to be written into the wording of modern legal codes either. In any case, the Torah clearly views itself not as the fiat of an inscrutable Deity, but, rather, as a just and reasonable system of law whose wisdom should be apparent to all nations.

For this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, who shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. . . And what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this Torah, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:6,8).

It might be argued that fideism constitutes a refinement of Biblical faith, a higher plane of religious existence. The fideist has freely chosen to believe, while the characters who populate Scripture had belief forced upon them by the crude testimony of their own senses. How is Biblical man's concept of God to develop beyond the bounds of his personal experience of the miraculous?

Although miracles may "force" belief in the existence of God on those who witness them, they by no means dictate love of God or faithfulness to Him. This distinction might seem artificial, the theological fall-out of modern philosophy's attempt to sever values from facts. Could a person who had witnessed authentic miracles reject the God who had produced them? According to the Torah, yes. After living through a prolonged process of miraculous redemption from slavery, personally escaping the Egyptian army by crossing dry land in the midst of the sea, and eating manna from heaven, the Jewish people remained a cantankerous, rebellious mob of runaways. No act of Divine intervention could keep them from grumbling about Moses' leadership, the hardships of nomadic life, or their monotonous diet. Given half a chance, they would gladly worship idols or chase after Moabite women. No matter what *God* did, the *Jews* had to make up their *own* minds about being faithful to Him.

By adopting concepts from Hassidic thought, it is possible to develop a religious psychology which explicitly confronts the tension between man's unceasing struggle to establish an ever-more authentic relationship with God, and the primitive basis of that relationship in the testimony of Biblical history. While human spiritual development requires "falls" — periods of questioning — as well as "ascents," a Jew's fundamental indebtedness to the God who took him out of Egypt will always preclude the possibility of a complete break. Of course, the value of such a religious psychology for us is severely restricted by our ability honestly to accept the Bible as historically true.

That Biblical man did achieve a level of religious existence beyond that implied by a mere common-sense belief in God and His covenant, should be evident to any sensitive reader of Psalms. A verse such as, "Oh God, thou art my God; earnestly I seek thee: my soul thirsts for thee, my flesh longs for thee in a dry and thirsty land" (Psalms 63:2),

is clearly informed by a deep religious sentiment. Would we consider a woman's love for a man any more profound because she had no good reason to be sure that he really ever existed in the first place? Or would we merely question her sanity?

So far we have seen why most narrative portions of Scripture demand a literal reading, and why such a reading did not necessarily impose a limit on the reader's spiritual growth. It is also now clear why the Rabbis were not especially troubled by the idea of Job's fictional status. The action of Job takes place in the distant land of Uz, far removed from the arena of God's great interventions in history. Its protagonists are not even designated as being Jewish, so that anything which happens in the story has no bearing on Israel's covenantal relationship with God. The scope of action is personal. The vagaries of a single man's life, detached from broader public events, cannot offer sound evidence of God's presence. Since there was no compelling reason to accept Job as fact, the Rabbis were willing to treat it as Divinely inspired fiction.

Given that a fictional reading of Job was *possible* for Judaism, it still remains unclear why some of the Rabbis decided to *make good* on the option and declare Job a fable. Would it not have been safer to preserve the uniform validity of the entire Jewish canon? I believe that the main problem which the Rabbis had with the Book of Job was with the character of Job himself. According to the Rabbis, Abraham's unique piety was the original foundation of his election by God. What, then, are we to make of Job, an ancient, perhaps non-Hebrew, saint, perhaps a contemporary of Abraham himself, who underwent so much suffering, yet remained true to God? Was he Abraham's equal?

Many midrashim were written in response to this threat to Jewish chosenness. Some tried to prove Job a secret heretic, or that Abraham's trials were the more demanding. Talmudic concern for Abraham's rival reaches the heights of paradox in a statement of Rabbi Levi:

Satan's intentions were for the sake of Heaven... When he saw that the Holy One Blessed Be He was beginning to favor Job [over Abraham], he said, "God forbid, He has forgotten Abraham's love!" [and therefore set out to persecute Job] (*B. Bava Batra* 16a).

It is there further related that when Rav Aḥa bar Yaakov later retold this idea, Satan himself arrived to kiss the great rabbi's feet in gratitude!

While these Talmudic ploys help justify Abraham's election, they dilute the strong lessons of Job. If Job is portrayed as less than righteous, his suffering seems less appalling, his appeals to God's justice smack of insincerity. If Job is more righteous than Abraham, why was he not chosen by God? By fictionalizing Job, both Abraham's historical uniqueness and the high seriousness of Scripture's great theodicy could be preserved.

The Theo-Political Thought of Emil Fackenheim

HARVEY SHULMAN

IN *ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN JUDAISM AND Modern Philosophy: A Preface to Future Jewish Thought*, Emil Fackenheim attempts to distinguish between modern Jewish thought, and what he sees as the generally dominant anti-Jewish tendencies of modern *philosophical* thought. He argues that Judaism overcomes the conundrum which distinguishes between morality understood as God's revelation, and a morality whose basis lies in free will. In Judaism, it is only in periods of spiritual decay that one witnesses this separation of God's will and man's free choice. For Jews, today, there exists an overriding moral imperative — the survival of the State of Israel: and it is best understood as part of the revelatory-historical covenant between God and His people. Fackenheim rejects a passive messianic vision which is willing to delay Jewish political sovereignty, pending the arrival of the Messiah, as divorcing revelation from free will.

Modern Jewish thought is not “a mere antiquarian exercise” when it engages in the study of revelation and morality. To Fackenheim, God, in Judaism, is not understood as exclusively transcendent or philosophical. He is immanent and demonstrably present in our lives. Nor is Judaism about individual salvation. Judaism is historically rooted, and is about the survival of the community. Zionism is the blending of Judaism and Jewish secularism, of revelation and human will. It is, in fact, Jewish political sovereignty which challenges Hegel's belief (or Christianity's, for that matter) that “no nation appears on the world-historical scene more than once.”¹

Nineteenth-century Jewish thought distinguished, as do many contemporary Zionists, between the Jewish people and Judaism. Fackenheim calls for the re-emergence of a distinctive Jewish philosophy-theology, one which would speak to the people in its entirety, secular and religious, those in the *Galut* and those in Israel. This involves a return to the Bible and other classical Jewish texts. This is “an existential

1. Emil L. Fackenheim, *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy: A Preface to Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p.168. Hegel went beyond the abstract Enlightenment idea which supported the liberation of Jews as individuals, but not as Jews.

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necessity," as the Bible represents "the flesh-and-blood history of a flesh-and-blood people."²

The greatest threat to Jewish survival, prior to the Holocaust, he says, was the destruction of the Temple in 70 C. E. and the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 C. E., after which Hadrian decreed that Torah was not to be studied or taught. Akiba, in his resistance to Hadrian and the Romans, seems to have understood what many contemporary Jews do not, that the survival of the Jews, as a people, is inseparable from the survival of Judaism and its books.³

To Fackenheim, it is incomprehensible to conceptualize 4000 years of Jewish history and survival as separate from Judaism, with its acting and living God.

The Jewish religious thinker is in and of the present. He cannot be in and of the present alone. He is obliged to confront the classical sources of Judaism - Bible, Talmud, Midrash - even if he ends up with a modern dissent from the ancient wisdom. Nothing less than a genuine self-exposure to the past can lend Jewish authentication to his own modern thought.⁴

Therefore, even Hanukkah, celebrated as a divine miracle and as a testimonial to the courage of the Maccabees, is invoked to demonstrate that the differentiation between sacred and secular history is blurred, as is the interval of time between Haman and Hitler. Thus, Jewish history is "characterized by the all-important possibility of Fulfillment *within* history, not merely the ultimate Fulfillment of redemption, which can fulfill only by abolishing history."⁵ In Judaism, the contemplation of the Torah, study, and an ongoing, active, worldly life, are interconnected. Indeed, Fackenheim will argue that Torah study must go along with military service.⁶ Those who refuse to do their part in protecting Israel's national survival are, in fact, violating the halakhic obligation of preserving the people.

Although Fackenheim differs with some precepts of traditional Orthodox Judaism, he is attracted to its understanding of, and respect for, sacred history. He laments the

... self-styled "progressive" tendency within Judaism to confuse the most contemporary religious or moral challenge with the latest fad. All this

2. Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), pp. 18-19.

3. Fackenheim notes that Akiba's legacy is as a symbol uniting all Jews: for the observant one, Akiba stands as a man "heard in heaven," while for the secular Jew, Akiba's "proof of humanity will forever inspire humanity."

4. Fackenheim, *Encounters*, p. 173.

5. Emil L. Fackenheim, "An Outline of a Modern Jewish Theology," in *Quest for Past and Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 108.

6. David Hartman, citing Maimonides' *Letter on Astrology*, states that "if you wish to maintain the independence of your nation, then you must not neglect the art of war." See David Hartman, *A Living Covenant* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), p. 265.

disposes lightly of past, of tradition, of history, yet what is a person without a past?⁷

Attempts, historically, to delegitimize the State of Israel make it important for Jewry to understand that the 1948 re-establishment of Israel followed upon the existence of a previous Jewish state, politically sovereign, 2000 years ago. Fackenheim's work links the Jewish past, present, and future, and thus enables us to combat the often pervasive ignorance which characterizes much of what passes for Jewish intellectual life. Here, one is reminded of Jean Paul Sartre's observation, made in 1967, that although he did not know the nature of the Jewish tradition, he knew that one did, in fact, exist.⁸ Of course, this only very slight knowledge did not stop him from writing a book about the Jews.

The Jewish will to survive cannot be understood, however, through the prevalence of historical anti-Semitism, prejudice, and discrimination. Nor is Jewish tradition a meaningful analytic tool, unless it is inextricably tied to Jewish faith and the Sinaitic covenant, where God "speaks" and is "heard" not only, or even primarily, by individuals, but is experienced by the people, collectively. Fackenheim sees the Bible as the foundation of this faith, whether or not contemporary Jews are believers.

The past lived on, legislating to present and future; and the document which recorded it became the Bible, that is, the Book par excellence. Jewish thinking centered on its exegesis; Jewish living geared itself to its commandments and promises; Jewish experience interpreted itself as derived from the primeval experiences recorded in the Book. From the Biblical to the modern era, the Jews remained a people by virtue of the Book.⁹

For Jews, the lesson derived from the "sacrifice" of Abraham is antithetical to that appropriated by Kierkegaard, who saw him as the solitary "knight of faith." The Torah, and relevant Midrash, see Abraham as a member of a covenantal community. Fackenheim's idea of Judaism is outwardly directed. Salvation and human identity emerge in relationship to a community, and religious self-realization is seen as nihilism. The completely integrated life must transcend the self. As early as 1938, he wrote that "the call from Sinai addresses *K'lal Yisrael*, the bond of contemporaries in its own bond with the chain of generations . . ." ¹⁰

7. Emil L. Fackenheim, *What is Judaism* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), pp. 143–144.

8. Fackenheim, *Encounters*, p. 212.

9. Emil L. Fackenheim, "Jewish Existence and the Living God," in *Quest for Past and Future*, p. 118. Fackenheim argues that the modern expression "mankind" would have been rejected by the prophets as overly generalized and abstract, lacking commitment to a nation, be it Israelite or Philistine. Cf. Micah 6:18.

10. Emil L. Fackenheim, "Our Position Toward Halacha," in *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, ed. Michael W. Morgan (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 24–25:

Fackenheim's search for a vital and enduring Judaism leads him to reject both an Orthodoxy unable to go beyond a restrictive reading of Talmud and Torah, and a theological liberalism which adjusts to modernity by compromising with traditional and long-accepted ideas on the nature of God. From the decline of Sadduceanism, and the triumph of Pharasaic Judaism and the Maccabees, Fackenheim sees "literalism" as antithetical to mainstream Jewish philosophical and religious thought. Theological openness is incumbent in Judaism, and should be understood not as a violation of Halakhah, but as part of an interpretive tradition which includes the study of the Oral Law. For Fackenheim, the sacred is not necessarily rigid.

Fackenheim invokes Maimonides on the unchangeability of the Torah. Maimonides, however, also tells us that one must live by the Torah, not die by it — if necessary one should emigrate. For Maimonides, (though not for the victims of the Holocaust), emigration was an option. Fackenheim notes that the existence of the State of Israel re-establishes Maimonides' halakhic alternative for those who might face, once again, the danger of apostasy, or worse. Or, to put it differently, all Jews are compelled, halakhically, to do nothing which might undermine Israel and, thus, Jewish survival.

He sees a dialectical reconciliation between religious passivity and patience, on the one hand, and the messianic dimension of Judaism which seeks, through human agency, the rapid transformation to a better life. The tradition of simultaneously integrating contradictory precepts begins in midrashic theology, as he reiterates when he says that "Israel's election is a divinely imposed fate — and a free human choice. Man must wait for redemption as though all depended on God — and work for it as if all depended on man."¹¹

Modern Israel, therefore, can be understood as a metaphoric midrash — one which remains spiritually vital, even as it rejects fatalistic passivity and political despair. Fackenheim states that Midrash constitutes the "profoundest" authoritative Jewish theology, allowing for poetry, narrative, and imagination to reinterpret Jewish systematic thought within an acceptable framework. In Midrash (he says), a humble agnosticism, expressed in story and parable, often ranks higher than theological certainties.¹²

Fackenheim's theo-political framework for Jewish unity and survival extends beyond halakhic-midrashic exegesis to concerns about assimilationist tendencies among contemporary Jews. Though "Jewish survival has become holy even for secularists-and the holy is not negotiable,"¹³ there are modern-day Rosa Luxembourgs who would iden-

11. Fackenheim, "These Twenty Years: A Reappraisal," in *Quest for Past and Future*, p. 16.

12. Fackenheim, *What is Judaism?* p. 15.

13. Emil L. Fackenheim, "From Bergen-Belsen to Jerusalem," in *The Jewish Return into*

tify with the sentiments expressed in a letter that she wrote, while imprisoned — “why do you pester me with your Jewish sorrow? There is no room in my heart for Jewish troubles.”¹⁴ Luxembourg identified with all of the world’s oppressed, except her own people. Unfortunately, her vision has been common among many Jewish intellectuals, from Spinoza to Deutscher.¹⁵

Fackenheim observes, ironically, that only Jews are expected by such intellectuals to become “men-in-general.” Furthermore

... [A] Jew can be faithful witness to his universal God only in his particular, singled-out Jewish condition, not through some manner of flight from it ... Today, no Jew, however deeply involved in universally human concerns, can go on pretending to himself he is a man-in-general. The universal and the particular are inextricably intertwined ...¹⁶

For a Jew, the beginnings of universalism and particularism must be understood with reference to a Biblical tradition which affirms universal (not international) religious precepts. This tradition prescribes a specific covenantal relationship between God, the Jewish people, and a promised land (territory). The State of Israel was not created in 1948 — it was reconstituted after 2000 years of Jewish exile, and now, as then, Judaism mandates a religious-political commitment where man is a participant, not a spectator. Fackenheim cautions against modern-day Hellenists who, with the best of intentions, would destroy Judaism by asserting its modern relevance separate from its religious-political origins.

The attractions, and consequences, of Jewish assimilation are of momentous significance for the preservation of Judaism and the State of Israel. Secular-religious differences among Jews do not constitute as great a threat as the danger of Jewish self-denial. For Fackenheim, “since the Six Day War ... Jews in America, perhaps for the first time, are being tested. It takes something to stand up for one’s Jewishness .. and the key issue is Israel.”¹⁷

It is an intellectual travesty that contemporary “universal” Jews are unable to distinguish between valid criticism of Israel, and the type of liberalism which “objectively” delegitimizes Judaism. The right of Jewish national self-determination (which might be the same thing as Jewish survival) must be asserted:

When I first called Auschwitz unique my assertion was at once taken to mean that a dead Jewish child at Auschwitz is a greater tragedy than a dead German child at Dresden. That was a misunderstanding possible

History (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 143.

14. Emil L. Fackenheim, “Jewish Ethnicity in ‘Mature Democratic Societies’: Ideology and Reality”, in *The Jewish Return into History*, p.151.

15. See Harvey Shulman, “The ‘Non-Jewish Jew’,” *The Jerusalem Post*, September 1, 1987.

16. Fackenheim, “These Twenty Years: A Reappraisal”, pp. 3,4.

17. Fackenheim, “From Bergen-Belsen to Jerusalem,” in *The Jewish Return Into History*, p. 140.

only because of anti-Semitism (conscious or unconscious) that distinguishes “universalistic” Jews concerned with others to the point of consenting to group suicide, and “particularistic” Jews who deserve this nasty epithet if they show any concern whatever for the fate of their own people. This ideology, I say, tempts many: witness the countless Jews today who risk much in behalf of Vietnam or the Black ghetto but will not utter a word against Polish or Soviet anti-Semitism. Hatred of the Jews on the part of others has always produced self-hating Jews — never more so than when disguised as moral ideology.¹⁸

Fackenheim rejects a vision of Judaism which either denies its religious foundation, or is insensitive to the message of Auschwitz, now formulated as the 614th commandment. Specifically, “*the authentic Jew of today is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another, posthumous victory.*” This means that the contemporary Jew is obligated to learn and remember his own history, and to understand the relationship between national survival and national-religious identity. In May and June, 1967, Jewish survival was again threatened. The all-too-recent memory of Auschwitz and the Christian world’s complicity in the loss of the Six Million, traumatically thrust itself on the consciousness of Jews. Fackenheim asks:

Why should Christian spokesmen have remained neutral as between Israel’s claim to the right to live and Arab claims to destroy her . . . if not because of old, unconscious, theologically-inspired doubts as to whether the “fossil” Israel did indeed have the right to live? Why has there always been much Christian concern for Arab refugees from Israel, but none whatever for Jewish refugees from Arab countries . . . if not because of old, no longer consciously remembered ecclesiastical doctrines to the effect that Jews (unlike Arabs) must be kept landless, and therefore rightless? Why were ecclesiastical authorities untroubled by two decades of Moslem control of Christian holy places (and of Arab desecration of Jewish holy places) and yet so deeply distressed by Jewish control?¹⁹

If Christianity truly is to be able to come to terms with its history of anti-Semitism, it must unambiguously affirm its support for Zionism. This will demonstrate its ability to deal with Jews and Judaism with respect to their particularity and permanence, rather than through a form of Christian charity and condescending openness. Israel’s existence is now challenged, as once was the existence of Jews. Some seem to feel as if Israeli “intransigence” has delayed redemption. Or, as one American cleric stated, “Israel might have to die for the peace of the world.”²⁰ Fackenheim notes that Christianity has engaged in a two-millenia attempt theologically to delegitimize the Jewish people out of existence. Rosemary Ruether is acknowledged as one theologian who

18. Emil L. Fackenheim, “The People Israel Lives: How My Mind Has Changed,” in *The Jewish Return Into History*, p. 45.

19. Emil L. Fackenheim, “Jewish Faith and the Holocaust: A Fragment,” in *The Jewish Return Into History*, pp. 37–8.

20. Emil L. Fackenheim, “Diaspora and Nation: The Contemporary Situation,” in *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, p. 299.

has come to terms with the Christian anti-Semitism that is inherent in the New Testament. However, this did not mitigate her recently expressed, vitriolic hostility to the State of Israel and her opposition to the view that Judaism, as a religion, is entitled to a sovereign national-political homeland.²¹ It seems that

...if Auschwitz is a trauma for Christianity, the state of Israel, being the Jewish declaration of independence from Christian charity, is a trauma for Christian anti-Semitism.²²

For Fackenheim, Jerusalem and the State of Israel represent the salvation and resurrection of the Jewish people, brought to the verge of annihilation by the Nazis. Tragically, attempts to destroy Israel and Jews continue unabated. He presents us with alternatives: either a peaceful and secure Israel — Hitler's ultimate defeat, or, the destruction of the State of Israel and, with it, the inextricably linked demise of the Jewish people and Judaism. It is the covenantal religious basis of the Jewish religion and, later, the Holocaust, which constitutes the basis for modern Israel's identity.

This became transformed into the commandment to survive, which is obligatory on all Jews, be they secular or religious. The existence of a sovereign State of Israel in the 1930s would have meant that the Jews who were able to escape from Europe might have survived. Therefore:

Jerusalem, while no "answer" to the Holocaust, is a response; and every Israeli lives that response. Israel is collectively what every survivor is individually: a No to the demons of Auschwitz, a Yes to Jewish survival and security.²³

Jewish psychological, spiritual, and physical resistance to the horrors of the Holocaust becomes an ontological reality for future Jewish existence. The traditional connection between the Holocaust and the State of Israel sees the settlement of Israel, by survivors, as a natural phenomenon. Fackenheim asks, however, whether it would not have been just as natural for the remnants of European Jewry to escape all attempts to have them defined, once again, as Jewish. One could

21. In Washington, March 1987, at the Palestinian Human Rights Campaign Conference, Reuther bitterly criticized Fackenheim as representative of the view that "Zionism has sought, from the late forties, to establish a link between guilt for the Holocaust and support for Israel. This is done by making Israel appear to be a messianic sign of Jewish victory over the Holocaust. It is also done by making symbolic transfers between Nazis and Arabs, so that the struggle against Hitler is seen as continued in the Israeli fight against Arabs." See, Rosemary Ruether, "Zionism and the Ideological Manipulation of Christian Groups," *American-Arab Affairs* (Fall 1987): 63.

22. Emil L. Fackenheim, "The Nazi Holocaust as a Persisting Trauma for the Non-Jewish Mind," in *The Jewish Return Into History*, p. 79.

23. Emil L. Fackenheim, "The People Israel Lives: How My Mind Has Changed," p. 54.

reasonably argue that all theological or historical explanations which deterministically link Israel and the Holocaust are unsatisfactory.

Yet . . . it is necessary not only to perceive a bond between the two events but also so to connect them so as to make a bond unbreakable. Such a bond is *possible* because to seek a *cause* or *meaning* is one thing, to give a response is another. And it is necessary because the heart of every *authentic* response to the Holocaust — religious and secularist, Jewish and non-Jewish — is a commitment to the autonomy and security of the State of Israel.²⁴

The Holocaust is not simply one more tragedy in Jewish history. It represents a qualitative separation and “rupture” of the Jewish present, past, and future. Auschwitz witnessed not only the death of men, but the death of “the idea of man” and the paralysis of man’s “metaphysical capacity.” For Fackenheim, Auschwitz produces the commanding voice demanding Jewish survival (“*Jews are not permitted to hand Hitler posthumous victories.*”). This survival, although inseparable from the existence of the Jewish State of Israel, is not exclusively political-national — it is, as well, about Judaism. “ . . . [A]fter Auschwitz, and because of Auschwitz, the Jew must be a witness to the world, preparing a way for God.”²⁵

However, after Auschwitz, is it possible still to believe in a wholly positive and optimistic vision of man as depicted by the Enlightenment and its contemporary offshoots? It should be noted that those who now invoke the “death of God,” because of Auschwitz, are generally secular-agnostics who would have aggressively preached the total triumph of modernity and “progress” against religious belief, whether or not a Hitler had emerged.

Fackenheim rejects traditional pre-Holocaust Jewish religious notions of *Tikkun* which ignore the imperative of national, as well as Jewish religious, survival. Although he looks to Jewish history and the classic religious texts, the Holocaust brings him to a fundamental revision of Jewish Orthodoxy. For him, in effect, the Holocaust has made all Jews into a holy remnant. His concern goes beyond ritual and dogma, to Jewish physical survival, without which Judaism is impossible. And survival demanded, and demands today, a renewed interpretation of Torah to meet the exigencies of modern life.

He concludes that *teshuvah*, without the State of Israel, is unthinkable, whether or not one is observant.

We are forced to conclude that if, in our time, there were no State of Israel, it would be a religious necessity, with or without the help of God, to create it. Without such a state, the end of Galut Judaism would also be the end of Judaism.²⁶

24. Emil L. Fackenheim, “The Holocaust and the State of Israel: Their Relation,” in *The Jewish Return Into History*, p. 282.

25. Fackenheim, “These Twenty Years: A Reappraisal”, p. 27.

26. Fackenheim, *What is Judaism*, p. 324.

Zionism, a form of modern-secularist nationalism, places the onus on man to seek his own emancipation, rather than passively and patiently waiting for God's redemption. Jewish secular nationalism, however, emerges out of a religious consciousness, without which the idea of a return to Zion would have long ago disappeared. Zionism, therefore, is more than the establishment of the Jewish State along the lines of any other national-territorial entity; it is rooted in Judaism, not understood exclusively as ethical monotheism, or exclusively as a tradition of modernity and reason, unfolding continually on a higher and more advanced plain as we "progress" historically. Rather, Judaism is, for Jews, an authoritative tradition possessing an "intrinsic religious truth." Abraham and Moses were not "progressive thinkers," speaking to contemporary notions of "relevancy," with a message to be randomly appropriated. With all other prophets, they exemplify, for Jews, a belief in revelation and God's direct involvement in Jewish history. Fackenheim asks:

How long can Judaism remain alive, as a religion in a non-Jewish majority culture, on the basis of a relativistic ideology? For while such an ideology may demonstrate a right to his Jewishness, it must, in due course, destroy every genuine incentive for making use of that right.²⁷

The attraction of secular culture, to most Diaspora Jews, constitutes a great threat to the maintenance of an authentic Jewish consciousness, however defined. Ironically, secular Diaspora Jews need Israel's continued existence in order to affirm their Jewish identity, and, perhaps, in the long run, it is only in the State of Israel that a Jew will be able to be sustained as a non-observant Jew.

Nevertheless, traditional distinctions between secularism and religious observance are divisive, and inappropriate to Jewish identity and the survival of Israel in the post-Holocaust age. A vital Judaism, and a vital Israel, will need to incorporate a belief in the power of human action with a realization that, although there are limits on human creativity, only God is unlimited in His powers. The seeming paradox between faith in man and faith in God is resolved, for Fackenheim, through the midrashic notion that one must act "as though all depended on man and pray as though all depended on God."²⁸ When either religion, or hostility to religion, become extreme, Zionism is undermined. A sensitive reading of Israel's modern history would reveal that "religious Zionists do not count on miracles, while secular Zionists have been known to be astonished."²⁹

27. Emil L. Fackenheim, "Apologia for a Confirmation Text," in *Quest for Past and Future*, p. 152.

28. Emil L. Fackenheim, "Midrashic Existence after the Holocaust: Reflections Occasioned by the Work of Elie Wiesel", in *The Jewish Return Into History*, p. 264. Fackenheim, commenting on the understanding of Midrash in Elie Wiesel's work, observes the theological dimension inherent in midrashic thinking.

29. Fackenheim, "The Holocaust and the State of Israel: Their Relation," p. 278.

The first paragraph of the Israeli Declaration of Independence, largely the work of secular Jews, expresses the unity of Jewish national and religious history.

The land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here the spiritual, religious and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world.

In an age where Jewry was almost destroyed and assimilation remains an attractive option, the traditional division between secular and religious is, to Fackenheim, inappropriate. Therefore, the present-day religious Jew no longer can view the Jewish secularist as nothing but an apostate, and the present-day secularist Jew no longer can view the religious Jew as nothing but a dead relic.³⁰ The unity of all Jews, secular and religious, in Zion or in the Diaspora, is a prerequisite to the survival of Israel and Judaism.

*... the survivor is gradually becoming the paradigm for the entire Jewish people. Nowhere is this truth as unmistakable as in the State of Israel. The State of Israel is collectively what the survivor is individually — testimony on behalf of all mankind to life against death, to sanity against madness, to Jewish self-affirmation against every form of flight from it, and (though this is visible only to those who break through narrow theological categories) to the god of the ancient covenant against all lapses into paganism.*³¹

To the consternation of many Orthodox Jews, however, Fackenheim rejects the idea that the Torah is the Jewish fatherland. With the State of Israel, Fackenheim sees the return of Jews to their historical home as the primary redemptive act and as necessary for Israel's survival. In his most recent book, *What is Judaism?*, he begins his study with Jewish survival, not with God, or the Book, which many Jews do not accept as divinely inspired. Survival is the sacred duty of *all* Jews, and no theology of Judaism can emerge which fails to take this into consideration.

The events of the Six Day War vividly demonstrated that Jews were, ultimately, alone. The conscience of the world was, and is, an unreliable substitute for political and military power. For Fackenheim, theological salvation (understood, in Judaism, not as the saving of individual souls, but of the people as a whole from annihilation), is as rooted in the traumatic experiences of the Six Day War as it is in the Exodus, and the parting of the Red Sea. Indeed, Israel's conflict with its Arab neighbors, following immediately upon the Holocaust, must be seen as intrinsic to any contemporary understanding of religious Judaism.

30. Emil L. Fackenheim, "Post-Holocaust Anti-Jewishness, Jewish Identity, and the Centrality of Israel: An Essay in the Philosophy of Israel," in *The Jewish Return Into History*, p. 211.

31. Emil L. Fackenheim, "The Human Condition After Auschwitz: A Jewish Testimony One Generation After," in *The Jewish Return Into History*, p. 97.

In a world with a Holocaust but without a Jewish state, all Jews truly sensitive to what has occurred would surely be in a flight from their Jewish condition that would dwarf any thing known as "assimilation" now ... (And) the State of Israel cannot be taken for granted. If he is a secularist counting only on man, he knows that the state and its power are small, and its enemies numerous. If he is a religious Jew counting on God, he knows that a God who did not or could not prevent the Holocaust cannot be counted on to prevent a catastrophe for the State of Israel.³²

Without delving into philosophic complexities, I would note that a thorough evaluation of Fackenheim's importance as a Jewish philosopher would have to be understood in relation to his familiarity with the larger German philosophical tradition. His method of analysis is informed by his grounding in German idealism, its Hegelian revisions, and Kierkegaardian existentialism. The divisions between religious and secular Jew undergo, in Fackenheim's analysis, a Hegelian mediation, and assume a secondary importance when juxtaposed to the Holocaust and the existence of the State of Israel. Jewish history, Biblical and rabbinic Judaism, and Midrash, affirm the importance of man and his acting in history. Moses is not only God's messenger to man; he also represents the Jewish community to God. Although Hegel was unable to see it, it is Judaism which is able to "mediate" the universalist presence of God with the particular-finite actions of Jewish man-in-history. Zionism, itself, is not simply modern secular nationalism (if so, other territorial arrangements aside from Israel would have achieved far greater support among the Jewish population), it is also a religiously inspired *teshuvah*. The scene of secular and religious Israeli soldiers embracing at the Wall, following the 1967 liberation of Jerusalem, stands as a resonating theo-political metaphor for understanding modern Zionism.

Once during a long, hot wearying bus ride from Galilee to Jerusalem, the landscape — trees upon trees — at first seemed to do nothing to relieve the weariness. Gradually, I began to imagine the country-side as it must have been a century ago, and a teaching of Nachmanides came to my mind. The medieval mystic asked the question of when the redemption would arrive, and of how one could recognize the signs. There had been so many false signs and so many false Messiahs! At length he judged there was only one sign that could be trusted. Many nations had conquered and devastated the Land, but none had rebuilt it. When you see trees growing in the Land, Nachmanides concluded, then you may gather hope. I saw the trees of Galilee, and was astonished.³³

Today, Fackenheim's reminiscence resounds with heightened significance.

32. Fackenheim, *What is Judaism?* pp. 35-38, 217-218.

33. Fackenheim, "Diaspora and Nation: The Contemporary Situation," p. 305.

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Good-Bye, Father: A Journey To The USSR

LEONARD GROB

MY ESTRANGEMENT FROM MY FATHER WAS palpable. Bernard (Ben) Grob was born in 1904 in Stanislaw, a Galician town, later part of Poland, and a Russian city after 1945. Attracted by the promise of new and broader horizons, my father, the oldest son of furriers, emigrated to the United States. He was a young man of nineteen. What were his dreams, his hopes, his fears? How did he imagine his life in America? Caught up in the concerns of a growing boy in America, I never thought to ask, and the pile of unasked questions grew steadily with the passing years.

At age 58 Ben Grob died of cancer. Twenty-six years later, in the summer of 1989, my wife Susan and I set out for Stanislaw; like many of our generation, we were embarking on a journey to seek our roots. My primary interest, however, was not to learn the names and histories of generations of Grobs before me; I was not moved to construct a family tree. And, although my older sister, Anita, and I were the children of the sole Grob family member from Stanislaw to escape the Holocaust, my essential aim was not to trace the lives of these victims of Nazi terror. My wish was to reach for my father, to touch his life, so that now, after twenty-six years, I could say good-bye.

Tales of Stanislaw

Left behind in Stanislaw after my father's departure were his parents, Simon and Regina, four brothers, and two married sisters. Left behind, as well, was a bit of my father's soul. Anyone acquainted with Ben Grob knew that part of his consciousness had remained in Galicia. Unlike my mother, who had arrived from Vilna at age two and who was fiercely committed to the Americanization of her family, my father was unwilling, or unable, to let go of the old country. The more Lillian Grob strove to rid her household of traces of a "greenhorn" mentality, the more my father retreated into the world of Stanislaw. The proprietor of Grob's Department Store in Bridgeport, Connecticut, was more at home in his nostalgia than in the affairs of everyday life. Reading and rereading Jewish history texts in the back room of the store, conversing in Polish with customers, reminiscing with friends from Eastern Europe

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— these were among the times when my father was most at home with himself.

Ben Grob seemed compelled to tell tales of how it was, back there in the world of his boyhood. During the two or three evenings each week when he would come home to eat dinner with me — my mother and he took turns tending the store at these times — there was often but one topic of conversation: Stanislav. I was bored and resentful. What had these stories to do with me and my friends? How could I enter a life so distant and so crude? Why did I have to endure the endless repetitions? The more my father would inhabit that world of narrow streets and bearded faces, the more my eyes would glaze over. I would stare blankly ahead, hardly listening, waiting for the stories to end so that I could return to my life in the here-and-now. I felt relieved when it was my mother's turn to come home for dinner; Lillian Grob would talk to me about what was real. Following her lead, I shunned all that smacked of the old world; I was my mother's child.

The tales of Stanislav had a tragic ending. Sometime between 1941 and 1943, the entire Grob family, along with approximately thirty thousand other Jews of their town, were put to death by Nazi killing squads, the notorious *Einsatzgruppen*. The destruction of his family cast a pall over Ben Grob's telling of Stanislav stories; an ineffable sadness haunted his being. Later, I would come to realize how alone he must have felt in America. Surrounded by his family, by numerous relatives on my mother's side, and by friends, my father remained, in some significant sense, a solitary being. At age forty he led an orphaned existence.

As he recounted the little that he had come to know of these tragic years, my father's eyes would fill with tears. Frightened by this display of sorrow, I withdrew further into thoughts of friends and baseball. And if the subject of the Holocaust emerged in my mother's presence, it was instantly and firmly rejected: the precious son of Lillian Grob was to be protected at all costs from stories of Nazi atrocities half a world away.

My father's failure to learn the precise time and place of his family's murder added to a sense of grim mystery surrounding his "other" life. The Jews of Stanislav, roughly one-third of the city's 1939 population, were killed in a number of Nazi *Aktionen*. The major actions are well-documented: one thousand of the intelligentsia were killed in August 1941, twelve thousand Jews were killed at the cemetery on October 12th of that year, ten thousand were deported to the Belzec death camp in the Spring and Fall of 1942, many thousands more were killed on the ghetto streets on the Jewish New Year of 1942, and, finally, the remaining Jews were killed and the ghetto liquidated in February, 1943. But the exact circumstances of the Grob family's death remained unknown. The constant stream of letters from parents, sisters, and brothers simply stopped.

I remember vividly my father's Sunday trips to the Stanislav fraternal organization (*Landsmanschaft*) in New York City. Here, during and following World War II, he inquired about the fate of his family. Generally passive in his bearing, he showed great intensity in the hours before and after these visits; his eyes burned in his head. But the yield from these New York travels was never definitive. From his interviews with Stanislav refugees came this information alone: the Grob family had most likely been forced out of their houses in the Halicka Street area of the ghetto, and shot. More than this my father was never to know.

Among the many sorrows weighing on my father's heart was the story of Isaac, his youngest brother. In 1938, letters arrived from Isaac, age 17, and his parents, imploring Ben and Lillian to arrange for his emigration to the United States. Whether his motive was solely to avoid conscription into the Polish army or whether he also had a premonition of what would soon befall his people was not clear. But Isaac's letters took on increased urgency: "Please rush the papers so they'll get to the consulate as soon as possible," he pleaded in June. And in November: "Dear Benny, I beg you to get me out of here." Letters sent to Isaac after early 1939 met with no response. Had Ben Grob done enough? The question troubled his soul.

In light of the tragedy of Stanislav, visits from *the cousins* from Queens took on special significance. The Billigs were Ben's favorites among the few cousins who had escaped the Holocaust. Although visits were infrequent — they were not a priority in my mother's scheme of things — Ben Grob would look forward to them like few other events in his life. Prior to the guests' arrival, he would pace the floor expectantly: *his* family was about to enter the home. Lillian Grob was well aware, after her husband's death, of just how important these encounters were to my father's emotional life. In later years, when she was alone, my mother berated herself for not having invited *the cousins* more often. Looking back over thirty-two years of marriage, this was among her chief regrets.

My mother was not alone in having regrets. During my father's lifetime I had failed to move toward him; then, when I was twenty three, he died. Only in my late forties did I truly begin to miss him. I had spent the intervening years zealously tending my own children; I was a self-proclaimed super-dad. As my children grew up and left home, I understood that the deep sadness which I felt had to do not only with the absence of children for me to father, but with the absence of the person who had fathered me. Relieved of my daily duties as a parent, I was free to confront what it meant to be parented.

Also during these years, I ended a prolonged adolescent rebellion against my Jewish upbringing; I set about the task of reexamining my heritage. As I did so, I began to feel keenly the loss of my father and

the world of East European Jewish life which had nurtured him. Two decades after my father's death, I was ready to draw near.

And I had something to build on. Amid the many failures to hear my father's voice, there was one success. I recall with clarity a theme which echoed plaintively through the telling of Stanislav tales. My father would repeat the refrain: "I have one wish in life: to return to Stanislav and cry on the soil where my family was killed." The demands and distractions of everyday life, lack of financial resources, and an early death, prevented Ben Grob from seeking to fulfill his wish. It was to realize my father's dream, and thus come close to him, that I set forth for Stanislav in the summer of 1989. Only then, I believed, would I be able to say good-bye to a father to whom I had hardly said hello.

The Journey

The journey to Stanislav began six months before our departure. An initial query of Intourist, the USSR tourist authority, produced a disconcerting response: Stanislav (renamed Ivano-Frankovsk by the Russians) was not on the list of government-sanctioned tourist sites. We would have to travel to Lvov, the nearest open city, and there request special authorization for our visit. If approval were given, an Intourist driver would accompany us on the seventy-five mile journey to Ivano-Frankovsk. Faced with the realization that I might never get to stand on the soil of Stanislav, I was determined to pull out all stops to obtain permission for our visit. At the same time, I resolved to set forth on a journey of the soul for which no permission was required. I would not be a materialist: if I did not reach the physical site of Stanislav, the essence of the dream could still be realized. I would embark on a quest, a process; undergoing this process would, in and of itself, constitute success.

I began by trying to contact the Queens relatives. Cousin Helene's letter, imploring me to stay in touch, had remained unanswered in my file cabinet for nine years. Trembling, I dialed the phone. Four rings, and then — a pre-recorded tape with Christmas music. I hung up in dismay. A second call provided the explanation: Helen was dead, the apartment sublet. I had missed seeing my cousin alive by ten months. Fighting the temptation to wallow in guilt, I roused myself to move forward. A phone conversation with Helene's son and visits with other cousins (some previously unknown) helped me touch my father's past.

To know my father was to know the history of the Jews of Stanislav. Almost every day during the Winter and Spring of 1989, I researched this history; I was like a novice preparing for orders. At YIVO, the center in New York City devoted to the study of East European Jewry, I pored over volumes depicting Jewish life in Galicia in general and the life of Stanislav Jews in particular. I read the Memorial Book (written

by several of the city's survivors), explored collections of photographs, and scrutinized the annals of the now-defunct *Landsmanschaft*. In one history of Stanislav I found a map of the ghetto area: there was Halicka Street before my eyes. I studied the map reverently, caressing the page with my hand.

Next, I sought living witnesses. Some fifteen hundred Jews of Stanislav had survived the War, many having fled east prior to the June, 1941 Nazi invasion. Names of thirty survivors living in the United States were given to me by a professional genealogist. I wrote the same letter to all: I, Leonard Grob, am planning a trip to Ivano-Frankovsk. Can anyone provide me with information about Jewish life in Stanislav in the early twentieth century? I also need help locating certain sites in the city: where was the ghetto? 41 Halicka Street? the Jewish cemetery? Finally, does anyone remember my family?

At the same time that I was sending letters to inhabitants of Stanislav-past, I made public announcements, both in a Russian language newspaper and on a Russian language radio program, requesting information about the Ivano-Frankovsk of today: I am embarking on a roots journey to Ivano-Frankovsk in early June. Does anyone know present-day residents of the city who might help me trace my family's past? Might someone be willing to show me the sites that I seek?

My efforts bore fruit. To my surprise, I was swamped by letters and phone calls from survivors. Letters arrived from all corners of the United States and Canada; calls came from Chicago, Detroit, Fort Wayne, Miami. Although none of the respondents had known my family, and few had exact knowledge of Jewish sites, *all* had Holocaust tales to tell; all needed to bear witness again to their tragic past. My family's story, I came to realize, was also theirs.

In the course of the telling, all-too-familiar stories reacquired some of their original horror. With voices sometimes angry, sometimes plaintive, my respondents told their tales: an infant was killed so her cries would not reveal a hiding place; an elderly couple was beaten with clubs to hasten their march to the cemetery; starving children drank urine to forestall death. Some spoke of the local citizenry applauding as Jews were rounded up for deportation to Belzec. "What did we do to provoke their hatred?" one survivor asked, referring to her Ukrainian tormentors. A half century later, these tales still demanded to be retold; I was the occasion for one more retelling.

Not all respondents supported my quest to visit Stanislav. Some were pessimistic about my chances of obtaining permission. One caller, a recent emigré from Ivano-Frankovsk, told me my chances were nil: he had lived in the city for some thirty years after the War and had never laid eyes on a tourist. Ivano-Frankovsk, he went on, was the site of munitions factories and uranium mines. The Soviets would never

allow American tourists to visit; I would be wasting time and money traveling to Lvov.

Others argued that even if I succeeded in visiting the city, what would I see? Everything important to Jews — synagogues (there had been more than fifty prior to the War), cemeteries (there had been two), evidence of Jewish cultural life — all had been destroyed. I would see only a wasteland of Jewish existence.

Still others questioned the morality of my journey. “How can a Jew in 1989 want to set foot in a place where his people had suffered so much?” One survivor whom I visited held back tears during a three-hour narrative of her years in Stanislav. (The narrative included a recounting of the loss of two of her three children during her escape from the ghetto.) She started to cry only at the end of our conversation when she asked how I could consider returning to these sites of destruction. My visit, it appeared, would delegitimize her pain.

Many respondents understood my purposes and wished me success. And one person offered the very help that I sought. Jacob Mendelsohn,* a resident of Queens who had emigrated from Ivano-Frankovsk eleven years ago, answered the Russian-language newspaper notice. He had dear friends currently living in the city. Would I meet with him at his place of employment in Manhattan? We had lunch together that week. Convinced of my sincerity, he told me about his friends, Samuel and Rebecca Gurvitz, engineers in their early fifties, who had moved to Ivano-Frankovsk after the War. He would write to them on my behalf. I knew that I had made a contact born of a deep human concern, and a sense of solidarity with *Am Yisrael*, the Jewish people.

Four weeks had passed when Mendelsohn phoned me. The very day when the Gurvitzes had received his letter, they had phoned him from Ivano-Frankovsk. Not only would they be happy to show us the Jewish sites, but Samuel volunteered to drive the three-hour route from Ivano-Frankovsk to Lvov, bring us to the city, and then return us to Lvov. We were blessed with angels in my father’s city.

As our June 6th departure date approached, Susan and I met with Russian travel experts who offered tips for negotiating permission to visit Ivano-Frankovsk. We were to be polite but persistent, and we were to stress our concern, in common with the Russian people, for victims of Nazi oppression. And if permission was not immediately forthcoming, there were ploys at our disposal. Susan might cry, beseeching the authorities with the lament, “We’ve come thousands of miles to visit my husband’s father’s birthplace. . .” We were to talk at length about our roots in the Ukraine (“We’re practically cousins!” I might say to an Intourist official who had family in the Ivano-Frankovsk region). And we were (subtly) to let it be known that we had gifts for those

* The names of all but my family members have been changed to protect their privacy.

officials who were expending extra effort in reviewing our case. With these strategies in hand, we headed for Kennedy Airport and the next stage of a journey-inward.

Coming Home

Few events in the days to come would seem ordinary; we travelled in a sacramentalized space. Waiting for our bus to the airport, for example, a fellow passenger, Mary Beth, American as apple pie in her tailored outfit and upstate New York accent, inquired about our trip abroad: "Where are you heading?" she asked. We told her in a few brief sentences. When we parted, she turned to me and whispered: "Don't forget to leave a kiss on the soil for your dad."

Our itinerary took us first to Poland, where we travelled to Rypin, the small town west of Warsaw in which Susan's father had spent part of his boyhood. During a visit to a Holocaust memorial room in the Rypin Museum, I was struck with an idea for memorializing my father's family. On the walls of this room were photographs and names of some who had died at the hands of Nazi invaders in 1939; among them was Susan's great-uncle, Yakob Stencel. A pang of envy shot through me: these dead, like the dead of my family, had been murdered by Nazis, yet they, at least, had a name. My father's family, believed massacred on the city streets and thrown into open pits at the cemetery, remained anonymous in their death: no memorial bore their name. If we gained permission to visit Ivano-Frankovsk, I would write the names of Grob family members on small slips of paper, tie these papers around the stems of flowers, and place them at the site of my father's house and at the Jewish cemetery. I would give the dead a name.

We arrived in Lvov, USSR, by train from Poland. A taxi transported us to our hotel, which displayed a faded elegance, complete with grand staircase and worn maroon carpeting. After settling into our room, we phoned the Gurvitzes, who had been awaiting our call all day. In halting English they assured us that Samuel would arrive at three o'clock the next day to bring us to Ivano-Frankovsk. Our angels had materialized.

Early the next morning we entered the Intourist office to plead our case. Standing before us were two officials, tall, proper, business-like women. In studied tones we made our request: my father was born in Ivano-Frankovsk; we have come all this distance to honor his memory; we have been offered private transportation to and from Ivano-Frankovsk; may we visit? "Please come back in thirty minutes," was the response. We waited nervously in the lobby; after exactly half an hour, we reentered the office. In a matter-of-fact tone, one of the officials announced, "You may go." How could it have been so easy? What about the elaborate schemes? Our insides trembled as we offered a

polite thank-you. Months of anxious waiting were over; we would enter my father's city.

We pressed our luck: "Our friends from Ivano-Frankovsk will not arrive until 3 o'clock," Susan explained. "To make the round trip in one day would be difficult. May we sleep at their home?" The reply: again, an immediate and cordial "Yes." Glasnost, it appeared, was real.

Samuel arrived that afternoon, accompanied by his English-speaking friend, Malek, a husky, jovial professor of biology at the local college. We embraced with a warmth usually reserved for friends of years' standing. Malek was astonished at the ease with which permission had been given for our visit; to his knowledge, we were the first Americans allowed to sleep in a private home in Ivano-Frankovsk since World War II.

We travelled the three-hour route in a state of feverish excitement. The landscape itself seemed charmed: rolling hills, neatly-cultivated fields, lazy herds of cattle, some of which crossed the road. ("The Stanislav area is beautiful," so many had said.) Although the conversation was of great interest — the comparative merits of communist and capitalist systems, the shortcomings of collective farms (we passed one along the way), the Bush presidency — everything paled next to the exhilaration which we felt upon entering the city limits. As the sign, "Ivano-Frankovsk," came into view, Susan's hand squeezed mine. I had succeeded in my quest to come home.

Walking My Father's Streets

Dinner at the Gurvitz home was festive, replete with toasts to togetherness, hearty laughter, and probing discussions. The fare was sumptuous: bountiful platters of meat, fish, and pate, bottles of vodka and liqueur, home-baked cakes and candy. (How could they afford to set this kind of table, we asked ourselves.) The conversation, always compelling, turned especially serious when Samuel and Rebecca addressed the question of their emigration to the United States. What did we think, they asked.

We could do no better than repeat the words spoken to us by their dear friends, the Mendelsohns, a few days before our departure: "If you are asked by Jews in the Soviet Union for your advice whether they should emigrate to the United States," Jacob had exclaimed, "do not say they should and do not say they should not. Say: 'The adjustment is a very difficult one.'" "But," Anna Mendelsohn had added, "if they have children, and their children have dreams, tell them they must come." At lunch the previous week, Anna had spoken of her son, Vladek, ten years old when the family left Ivano-Frankovsk. Vladek had shown great interest in airplanes since earliest childhood. Had the family stayed in the Soviet Union, he, a Jew, would have been denied entrance to the field of aeronautics. "Next year," Anna had added qui-

etly, "he will graduate from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute with a degree in aeronautical engineering!" These words from the Mendelsohns weighed heavily on Samuel and Rebecca Gurvitz, the parents of two daughters.

Samuel was an earnest, energetic man, with playful eyes; Rebecca was stately, soulful, her facial expressions full of pathos. Both touched our hearts. We, who had only recently made the acquaintance of their Queens friends (and then only through a newspaper advertisement), were welcomed like closest kin. I felt an immediate sense of comfort in their home. Had I found the family in Stanislav which I had never had? The Gurvitzes gave us their delicately furnished bedroom for the night; in the morning we would visit the sites of old Stanislav.

We awoke to the sound of heavy rain accompanied by thunder and lightning, but when we had finished a splendid breakfast of delicious crepes, jams, caviar, fruit, and breads, the sun was shining brightly. As we were about to leave, Rebecca placed three exquisite roses in my hands. My heart raced: how had she anticipated my pain? We set out for the old ghetto streets.

The corner house at 41 Halicka Street was still standing! The large stucco dwelling was at least one hundred years old. In wonderment I moved my hand along its rough surface. These were the walls which had housed my father; these were the walls violated by Nazi storm troopers. Trembling, I placed a yellow rose, memorial paper attached, on a window sill: the dead of the Grob family were named.

After walking around the outside of the house and gazing dreamily up and down the narrow cobblestone street, we drove to the site of the Jewish cemetery, following the route familiar to me from the many descriptions of Stanislav survivors. (This was the route of the infamous forced march of Jews on October 12, 1941.) At a remove from the actual site of my father's house, in the back seat of the Gurvitzes's car, and with my head pressed against Susan's shoulder, I could weep.

We arrived at a clearing on the grounds of the original "new" Jewish cemetery of Stanislav. The lush greenery, washed by heavy rain and gleaming in the sunlight, contrasted starkly with the horror of the mass slaughters which had cocured on this very site. Amid the dozen or so gravestones of those who had died since World War II — older stones had been totally destroyed — stood a small monument to the Jews of Stanislav murdered by the Nazis. A few survivors had returned in 1946 to erect a stone. Inscriptions in Hebrew and Russian memorialized the death of so many at the hands of the "fascist Hitlerite murderers." The traditional Biblical citation mourned "the beloved and the pleasant, in their lives, even in their death they were not divided."

Suddenly, I could grieve not just for the Grobs, but for all these dead: only after I had given the Holocaust a face, the face of the Grob family of Stanislav, could I begin to grasp the ultimately ungraspable

fact of the slaughter of my people. In the endeavor to realize my father's dream, I had learned about encountering the Holocaust one "face" at a time. I placed the second rose at the base of the Jewish monument, and the third at a nearby monument to all of the World War II dead of Stanislav.

Memorials

Back in the familiar surroundings of New York, I have been pondering the significance of the journey back to my roots. I vividly recall the single yellow rose on the window sill surrounded by brown, aging walls; I call to mind the path to the cemetery from Halicka Street; I see our roses at the foot of the two monuments to the World War II dead.

Yet, among the many memorials to my father's family which we left in Ivano-Frankovsk, one, a memorial of a different sort, has left the deepest imprint on my soul. The ties we made with the Gurvitz family and with Malek are a *living* monument to the memory of my father and his family. We gave and received love in a part of the world where the terror of the Holocaust had once reigned supreme; we helped create a link between residents of nations still at odds in 1989. Roses wither; this memorial, I hope, will endure.

Shortly after our return home, a letter from Malek arrived, bearing witness to the intensity of feeling which we had shared. During our visit, he had inquired about Scrabble-playing in the U.S. He now wrote: "Someday I'll bring a team of Ivano-Frankovsk Scrabble players to the U.S. and we'll have a gala contest under the motto: 'Through Scrabble to mutual understanding, trust, and peace on the globe.'" He spoke of the nostalgia that he and the Gurvitzes were feeling for us; the letter concluded with the words: "We all give you and your children a big Russian bear — most friendly and cordial — hug."

* * *

What of my estrangement from my father, that which prompted my journey?

The visit to Stanislav has lessened the distance between us. But a part of me worries that if I stop telling my story, our newly-created closeness will begin to dissipate. A more authentic part of me, however, rests secure in the solid bond which has been forged between father and son — albeit much later than I would have wished.

I had endeavored to feel my father's feelings and think my father's thoughts during a journey of six months. I had left memorials of flowers to his family; I had left a living memorial of newly created friendships with residents of his birthplace. I had realized his dream of weeping on the soil of his city. I had finally heard my father's tales of Stanislav. I can now say good-bye.

The Exciting Future of Jewish Theology

Review-Essay by NEIL GILLMAN

A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism. By DAVID HARTMAN. New York. The Free Press. 331pp., \$22.50.

CLOSE TO FOUR DECADES AGO, THIS WRITER was an undergraduate philosophy major at McGill University in Montreal, deeply involved in the process of redefining his Jewish commitments in the wake of an encounter with the late Will Herberg, and against the background of extensive readings in contemporary existentialist philosophy. In the course of this inquiry, I turned to an Orthodox rabbi and asked him for a philosophically sophisticated, contemporary book on Judaism, written in English and from an traditionalist perspective. I was handed Samson Raphael Hirsch's *The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel*.

I can't recall, today, what impact this book had on my own thinking at that time. But some years later, when I began teaching Jewish philosophy, I re-encountered Hirsch and came to two conclusions: first, that he was a truly seminal figure, that he fathered Modern or Neo- (now Centrist) Orthodoxy and was the first to articulate contemporary Jewish traditionalism's response to the emergence of Reform and Conservative Judaism; and second, that it was absolutely incongruous that, in the early 1950s, the only defense of a traditionalist reading of Judaism which a serious student could read was a translation of a work, originally published in German in 1836.

But, in retrospect, what else was there at that time? The history of American Jewish philosophical/theological writing remains to be written, but precious little work of any school was available before 1950. The names of Mordecai Kaplan, Milton Steinberg, Jacob Agus, and Robert Gordis come to mind, and Buber's *I and Thou* was available in an English translation — none of them theological traditionalists. And Modern Orthodoxy didn't really become a full-fledged movement in American Jewish religious life, let alone produce an indigenous, English language, intellectual *apologia pro vita sua*, until at least a decade later.

Within the past decade, however, all of this has changed. Jewish traditionalism is arguably the most vigorous and productive movement on the American scene. This newly found self-confidence has led, in turn, to the realization that this position not only demands, but even *can* be afforded, a legitimate theological defense, that the Kaplans, Bubers, Ro-

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senzweigs, and Heschels and their latter-day disciples need not have the field to themselves. The full regalia of a theological school — periodicals, conferences, academicians, and creative, disciplined theological inquiries — are available. And with the publication of *A Living Covenant*, David Hartman establishes himself as a leading, articulate voice within this emerging school.

None of the foregoing should be taken to imply that Hartman's confreres will be thrilled with this book. But it would, indeed, be a tragic irony if the very assumptions of Jewish traditionalism serve to inhibit the theological creativity of its most articulate representatives.

Hartman's book is an extended essay on what he calls "covenantal anthropology." It is a closely argued, richly illustrated exposition and defense of one tendency or temper that he finds pervasive in the rabbinic tradition. This tendency, Hartman is quick to acknowledge, is not the only one, but it is the one that he finds personally most congenial. It is also, he insists, the temper that is most adaptive to the needs of modernity and of the current situation of Judaism and the Jewish people today, which, it need not be added, has witnessed both the Holocaust and the creation of the third Jewish commonwealth. (Hartman himself has been a citizen of Israel for some years now.) He writes, then, in the full glare of modernity. This is no pious, sentimentalized or nostalgic meditation on the glories of *shtetl* and *shtibl* Judaism. For Hartman, the twentieth century is here to stay, and the rabbinic tradition has the resources to engage it.

Hartman's thesis, in brief, is that the Jewish tradition manifests a tension between two anthropologies: one that accentuates human resignation, impotence, passivity, inhibition, and submission to God, and the other that accentuates human self-assertiveness, initiative, creativity, courage, and self-confidence. Both tempers can be rooted in differing understandings of the covenant. Hartman argues passionately in favor of the latter model over the former. He pursues his inquiry through extended phenomenological analyses of major themes in classic Judaism: Talmud Torah, prayer, the halakhic system, theodicy, and eschatology, and on through a searching critique of two contemporary Jewish thinkers of the older generation, his teacher Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Yeshaya Leibowitz. Finally, pervading just about every page of this volume is the figure of Moses Maimonides, in whose thought Hartman finds the epitome of what he seeks to extract, now in a modern idiom, from the Jewish past.

At the heart of Hartman's conceptualization lies a complex metaphor describing God's relationship with Israel. He portrays God as the lover who invites Israel to join Him in marriage. God's invitation and Israel's response are both freely entered into. On God's part, the invitation is a conscious act of self-limitation, for, to Hartman, the marriage relationship respects the dignity and individuality of both partners. Israel's covenantedness to God legitimatizes its independence, autonomy and integrity, but these are achieved only in, and through, the covenantal relation-

ship. Hartman's discussion of the dialectic of independence and bonding is acutely perceived.

The commitment . . . implies that the other is recognized as an individual with a will distinct from one's own. The self remains autonomous, but it is an autonomy in which the relational framework is fundamental to one's self understanding. The covenantal relationship involves a . . . fusion of relational self-understanding and autonomy. The love of the covenantal community for God is such that its members do not act with an isolated consciousness . . . But their covenantal relationship is not a mystical union with God in which their individual self-consciousness has vanished. The covenant invites responsibility and the acceptance of one's otherness from God (p.5).

Thus, Israel is invited to take the responsibility for joining God in the drama of building His Kingdom on earth and in history.

For Hartman, then, the covenant means liberation. The Bible liberates man morally, for God created us free as God is free — this is Hartman's understanding of *zelem Elohim* — and the Talmud liberates the intellect, for God has entrusted the elaboration of the Torah to rabbinic scholars. The price of this freedom is that God has to accept the inevitability of defeat, but God accepts His defeat with laughter (the story of *tanur shel akhnai* in *Baba Mezia* 59b). If anything, this defeat is itself a confirmation of His own deepest commitments. What are the parameters of this interpretive freedom? Hartman's startling response is to paraphrase a remark by Jacob Katz: the limits are “ . . . simply what the community is in fact prepared to accept as Torah” (p.8).

Talmudic Judaism provides the intellectual and experiential setting in which this freedom becomes expressed. It provides the context for Hartman's extended phenomenological analyses of specific aspects of Talmudic religion — all designed to support his reading of this tradition. Thus, though the Talmud is unconditionally accepted as revealed, yet the rabbis “ . . . exhibit enormous interpretive freedom and mastery over the revealed text” (p.37), even, as in the case of Rabbi Akibah, to offer interpretations that Moses himself could not understand. Prayer may be an expression of awe and submission, but it may also be “ . . . an assertion of the rights conferred by God upon human beings through the covenant and through the Torah” (p.53).

In a similar vein, Akibah's response to his martyrdom focused not on the reward that he was to experience in the world to come, but, rather, on the opportunity given to him “ . . . to realize his great religious dream to love God unconditionally, with a passion that transcended the normal human instinct of self-preservation” (p.193). Finally, Hartman understands classical Jewish eschatology as denoting not God's miraculous transformation of history, but rather, the slow and arduous concretization of *mizvah* “within the normal, everyday conditions of human existence” (p.283). This becomes the guiding assumption behind Hartman's appreciation of the messianic significance of the state of Israel.

Hartman is quick to acknowledge that his reading of the tradition is tendentious. He quotes generously from opposing talmudic, medieval and modern sources without challenging their legitimacy, but he also amasses the supporting documentation for his own approach and argues cogently for its legitimacy — not only given the conditions of modernity, but even in principle.

But one leaves this impressive inquiry with a nagging sense of something missing, of an issue unresolved, in fact, not only unresolved but actually ignored, or, even worse, kept well-hidden beyond the parameters of the inquiry. Hartman notes accurately that his book is an essay in covenantal *anthropology*. What he studiously ignores is the obverse, namely, covenantal theology. In a nutshell, how does Hartman understand revelation itself? What was *God's* role in revelation?

“Pluralism requires an epistemological framework that limits the claims of revelation” (p.18). But *where* are these limits? *What* was revealed? *What is* revelation? And if Hartman’s covenantal anthropology accentuates autonomy, spontaneity, creativity, freedom, liberation, and human dignity, can he then limit — as he seems to do — the operation of these dimensions of the human personality *within* the boundaries of the revealed Torah? Or should they not be extended to the revelatory experience itself so that they play a role in shaping the very content of Torah in the first place? In fact, how can Hartman justify *not* extending them in this way? But then, in what way is Torah authoritative? What is the theological basis for the *mizvah*? In what way is God a *mezaveh*?

To put this another way, if Hartman’s thesis centers about an elaborate covenantal metaphor, does the metaphor characterize simply the divine-human covenantal relationship established by the revelation, or should it not characterize the revelational experience itself as well? In this latter view, the entire description of the Sinai event in Exodus 19-20 would itself be metaphorical, an attempt to capture an elusive reality through concrete human images. But then, God did not really “speak” at Sinai, the words of Torah are human words, and the play of human autonomy and freedom in interpreting Torah would be legitimized *ab initio*.

That Hartman should want to skirt this entire issue is thoroughly understandable. What are his options? He could espouse a thoroughly traditionalist understanding of revelation whereby the Torah is verbally or at least propositionally revealed. In either case, there is a total congruence between the will of God and the words of Torah. But such a stance would seem to favor the submission and self-negation anthropology that Hartman chooses to reject. He dwells on the talmudic homily (T.B. *Shabbat* 88a) which contrasts the coercive quality of the Sinai covenant (“if you accept the Torah, well and good, but if not - there shall be your burial place”) with the freely assumed, reacceptance of the Torah in the time of Esther and Mordecai (pp.217ff.).

Further, Hartman's model views human freedom as developing within the framework of divine authority. Indeed, human freedom and divine authority exist in a dialectical relationship. Hartman seems to fear that any further encroachment of the human element into the revelational experience itself would destroy that dialectic by accentuating the autonomous instinct over the theonomous.

Alternatively, he could adopt a view of revelation that denies literalism in favor of acknowledging a more substantive human role in shaping the contents of Torah — Heschel's "As a report about revelation, the Bible itself is a *midrash*" (*God in Search of Man*, p. 185, expanded further in Chapter 27 of that volume), or Rosenzweig's "The primary content of revelation is revelation itself" (*On Jewish Learning*, p. 118). But both of these positions would inevitably require Hartman to redefine what he means by *mizvah* and to reconsider the issue of the authority of Torah, thereby undermining the traditionalist cast of his entire study. (His subtitle is, after all, "The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism"). In fact, under both of these models, the authority is transferred from God to the community. Both poles of the dialectic, the autonomous and the theonomous, become embodied within the community. But has not Hartman, himself, conceded this result in accepting Jacob Katz's definition of the limits of interpretive freedom as " . . . what the community is in fact prepared to accept as Torah"?

On this issue, then, Hartman is in a bind. As a result, the issue is avoided and his covenantal anthropology, however acutely perceived, authentically rooted and programmatically desirable, floats in a theological vacuum.

In fact, *A Living Covenant* ends up as a much richer and more substantial version of Eliezer Berkovits' *Not in Heaven*, with much the same shortcomings. Like Hartman, Berkovits argues for a more open recognition of the subjective, flexible, pluralistic understanding of the halakhic process as a legitimately *human* undertaking. Berkovits, too, plumbs the *tanur shel akhnai* anecdote which he interprets, much as Hartman does, as insisting on "the human share and responsibility in the interpretation and administration of the revealed Word of God (sic)", and that "the affairs of men cannot be guided by absolute objectivity, but only by human objectivity." Halakhah represents not "objective truth" but "pragmatic validity" (p.48). "Once a Jew accepts the Torah from Sinai, whatever it teaches him in his search for its meaning and message is the word of God for him" (p.51). Berkovits repeatedly invokes what he calls the "halakhic conscience" which he perceives as impelling the rabbis to limit the application of, or, at times, even render inoperative, a piece of biblical legislation which they find morally offensive (p.28). But, again, one searches in vain for a theology of revelation which might ground his understanding of the halakhic process.

While Berkovits limits his argument to the issue of halakhic develop-

ment, Hartman's canvass is much broader. It encompasses a phenomenology of much of Jewish religious life and teaching. The book remains, then, a passionately argued and authentically documented defense of a humanistic, pluralistic, flexible, and creative reading of traditional Judaism. Programmatically, then, it serves as an *apologia* for Modern or Centrist Orthodoxy. This position is clearly under siege today, both in Israel and in America. If anything, the current wave of fundamentalism in religion reflects a preference for the temper of submission and self-denial which Hartman rejects. This contemporary style in religion, together with Hartman's critique of much of Soloveitchik's theology, will unquestionably render this volume suspect in the eyes of precisely those of Hartman's confreres who could benefit most from his inquiry. If this is, indeed, the outcome, the Jewish theologically concerned community as a whole will be the loser.

But, if for no other reason, this book should be studied and taught for its concluding chapter, "The Third Jewish Commonwealth." Here, Hartman applies his reading of Judaism to the new challenges posed by the creation of the State of Israel. He insists that even if we reject, as he does, a simplistic reading of the rebirth of Israel in messianic terms as reflecting God's overt intervention in history, this event can yet exert extraordinary religious influence on the life of the community. Economic, social, and political issues, the moral quality of the army, the exercise of power moderated by moral sensitivity, can all be brought under the purview of Torah. With all of the ambiguities posed by these issues, yet "... where there is a potential for desecration, there is also a potential for sanctification" (p.287). In fact, Israel also exposes the moral and spiritual inadequacies in the Jewish tradition and can thus provide "... unique conditions for a serious critique of Judaism as it is practiced by committed halakhic Jews" (p.294).

Not unexpectedly, then, Hartman calls for a thoroughgoing re-evaluation of the place of religion and halakhah in Israeli life. But even beyond this, the chapter provides the most compelling argument for the Jew's throwing his lot in with Israel in a direct and personal way, not, as the usual Zionist rhetoric has it, because diaspora Judaism is doomed, but, rather, because Israel provides the broadest possible canvass for Judaism's engagement with modernity.

Both for its accomplishments and for its shortcomings, then, this is an extraordinarily important study. Hartman has presented us with an imaginative reading of rabbinic Judaism in terms that make it strikingly coherent with modernity. His reading of the tradition cannot be easily ignored. On the other hand, he has also — consciously or not — defined the agenda that lies ahead for traditionalist Jewish theology. Those issues, too, cannot be denied. If they will be addressed as forthrightly and coherently as Hartman does his own agenda, Jewish theology faces an exciting future.

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REVIEWS

On the Origins of Hasidism

The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism. By ABRAHAM J. HESCHEL. Ed. by Samuel H. Dresner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Reviewed by MORRIS M. FAIERSTEIN

ABRAHAM J. HESCHEL's best known response to the Holocaust is *The Earth is the Lord's* — his eulogy for East European Jewry. Less well known are his decisions to write a biography of the Baal Shem Tov (Besht), the founder of Hasidism, and to establish the hasidic Archives at the YIVO Institute, in 1949. Unfortunately, neither of these projects came to fruition. The four essays on four hasidic personalities who were associated in some way with the Besht's career, and which are collected and translated in this volume by Samuel H. Dresner, Heschel's disciple, are preliminary studies for the projected biography of the Besht. The Hasidic Archives project produced only one article, "Unknown Documents in the History of Hasidism", published in the *YIVO Bleter*, in 1952. That article is, in many ways, an appendix to Heschel's article on Pinhas of Korzec. Some material on the Baal Shem Tov was also incorporated in Heschel's last major work, *Kotsk: In Gerangel far Emesdikeit*, 2 Vols. (Tel Aviv, 1973).

The four figures studied by Heschel share several noteworthy characteristics. Perhaps most importantly, all of these people are on the periphery of hasidic history and none of them can truly be called a disciple of the Besht. They were all contemporaries of the Besht and shared his spiritual universe, but

they never accepted his teachings *in toto*. As a matter of fact, Gershon Kutover, his brother-in-law, and Nahman of Kosow were actively hostile to the Besht at an early stage of his career. Each of these figures was a unique personality, with his own history.

R. Pinhas of Korzec did not meet the Besht until shortly before the Besht's death in 1760 and, according to hasidic tradition, visited him only three times. Though he accepted the Besht's basic doctrine and adopted many of his customs, he was not averse to disputing some of his practices. For example, he said that *tefillin* should be worn on the intermediate days of the festivals, in contrast to the Besht who, basing himself on the Zohar, taught that *tefillin* should not be worn on those days. R. Pinhas' disagreement with the Magid of Mezherich, the Besht's successor, was fundamental. In contrast to the Magid's elitist spirituality, R. Pinhas stressed moral virtue and simple faith. Heschel concentrates on R. Pinhas' biography and only incidentally touches on his teachings. Perhaps he intended to return to the teachings in another study.

R. Gershon Kutover, the Besht's brother-in-law, emigrated to the land of Israel in 1747, at a relatively early stage in the Besht's career. Heschel devotes most of the article to R. Gershon's emigration and subsequent activities in Israel. He is important, however, because of his status as a member of the *Kloiz* of Brody, a group of spiritual adepts active before the Besht came on the scene.

R. Nahman of Kosow was an early opponent of the Besht who was won over to the Besht's teachings but still retained his independence. He was the most prominent member of the "Society of Hasidim" headed by R. Moses of Kutty, a group from which many of the Besht's early disciples were drawn.

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Heschel discusses R. Nahman's teachings at length, not only to show similarities to the Besht, but, equally importantly, to illustrate the differences in their respective teachings.

The fourth figure, R. Isaac of Drohobycz, was never, by hasidic tradition, considered a disciple of the Besht. It was only his son, R. Yehiel Mikhel of Zloczew, who became an important figure in the history of Hasidism. When the *bet din* of Brody decided on a public burning of the first hasidic book, the *Toldot Yaakov Yosef*, in 1780, the deed was done in front of R. Yehiel Mikhel's house.

Is there a common thread which unites these four apparently disparate figures? I believe there is. One of the seeming oddities in these articles is the omission of the studies on Hasidism by Gershom Scholem and his school. This absence is, I believe, not coincidental. The common thread that links these four figures is their spiritual activities which have many parallels to those of the Besht, but which are clearly independent and not influenced by him. If anything, the opposite could be said, that the Besht was influenced by these figures. Heschel is implicitly arguing against the Scholem-Weiss hypothesis of the origins of Hasidism. By focusing on these figures as implicit precursors of Hasidism, Heschel is arguing that the Besht must be understood in the context of the religious and intellectual currents in Eastern Europe in the first half of the eighteenth century. When compared to the figures whom Heschel has studied, the Besht is very much an integral part of his environment and his teachings, evolutionary rather than revolutionary. There is no need for Scholem's Sabbatian hypothesis or Weiss' "secondary intelligentsia." Heschel's basic insight has been amplified by M. Piekarsz's magiste-

rial study, *Be-Yemei Zemihat Ha-Hasidut* (Jerusalem, 1978).

The editor, Samuel H. Dresner, has contributed not only an important introductory paper, "Heschel as a Hasidic Scholar," but has also done an excellent job of updating the essays by adding references to scholarship that has appeared since they were originally written. This collection, by Abraham J. Heschel, is a significant contribution to the important and complex question of the origins of Hasidism. The completion of the task remains for the next generation.

Appelfeld's Vision: A Community Reborn

For Every Sin. By AHARON APPELFELD. Tr. from the Hebrew by Jeffrey M. Green. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. 169 pp., \$15.95.

Reviewed by ROBERT DIANTONIO

LIKE THE deliberate pace of his narratives, critical acclaim for Aharon Appelfeld has slowly and consistently evolved. Internationally, there is a large and appreciative readership calling for his election to Nobel status, while fellow writers in Israel speak of his books with great reverence. In discussing the fact that "things Jewish seem almost extirpated" from the works of younger Israeli authors, A.B. Yehoshua, in a recent interview with Haim Chertok, states, "The novels of Appelfeld . . . for me take the place of religion at the very center of Jewish culture." This unusual but deeply felt compliment is just one of many for the fifty-eight year old author of such masterworks as *Badenheim 1939*, *The Age of Wonders*, and *The Immortal Bartfuss*.

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In *For Every Sin*, Appelfeld's sparse and poetic prose creates a shadowy other-world, a post-apocalyptic vision where small groups of Holocaust survivors move across an unspecified countryside. One survivor is determined to separate himself from these refugees, the very people who shared his fate for the past three years. He has made up his mind to remove himself from any memory of the "camp years" and to take up where his old life left off.

When the war ended Theo resolved that he would make his way back home alone, in a straight line, without twists or turns. . . . He knew that this would separate him from people, and that he would have to remain in uninhabited places for many days, but he was firm in his resolve: only following a straight course, without deviation. Thus, without saying good-bye to anyone, he set out.

However, as he walks, his past begins to intrude upon this mythical present. Memories of his childhood and the figure of his beautiful mother are interspersed with emotionally strained encounters with fellow survivors. Theo Braun was brought up in a non-observant, assimilated family, a family where Yiddish was disdained and a reverence was fostered for old churches, Bach, Mozart, and the entire gamut of Germanic culture. Theo's mother, whose life was spent seeking things spiritual, through culture, moves in and out of sanity and, in the process, bankrupts the family.

Appelfeld creates character symbols that challenge his readership, and the figure of the mother is one of the most enigmatic. In Appelfeld's minimalist text every image is crafted with great care. In this aspect of his art he is the equal of Borges, Calvino, and other postmodernists; however, the postmodernist

aspects of this book are rooted in an emotional reality directly related to the Holocaust. Like Kafka's writing — long-admired by Appelfeld himself — this novel compels its readers to participate actively in its flow and interpretation. *For Every Sin* evolves into an existential conundrum as the mother's message is almost messianic. "God is with us. Make a pilgrimage to Salzburg. Mozart will give you wings. Free yourself of all bonds."

As she is taken away to the sanitarium, she shouts from her window, "The world of freedom is on its way, bringing an end to all suffering." Here, she is portrayed as a false prophet whose faith has been misplaced in the highest ideals of Germanic culture. As a thoroughly assimilated Jew, she expresses her need for spirituality in an exaggerated love of art and music. The reader is brought to an awareness of the irony of her prophesies, as a "world of freedom" is not on its way, nor will there be "an end to all suffering;" only the Holocaust awaits. In embracing the Germanic world, she had been blinded to its dark side — a side that Appelfeld's prose elegantly captures.

In one of the most forceful scenes in the novel, Appelfeld describes the Jews of Theo's peaceful resort town as they are marched to the train station and publicly degraded.

At the windows women and children stood and watched their progress in silence. No one called out, no one opened his mouth. . . . At the end of the street a paint contractor called out, "Death to the Jews, death to the merchants!" The synagogue, already abandoned, without worshippers for years, was gripped by flames at that moment. It burned quietly, without endangering the neighboring buildings. . . . At the entrance to the station they were ordered to get down on their knees.

The genius of Appelfeld's narrative style can be observed in this passage, as it synthesizes a world of emotions, and conveys the history and fate of European Jewry in simple, unadorned sentences.

Upon leaving the camps, the survivors contented themselves with modest pleasures: food, coffee, and cigarettes. In Appelfeld's narrative world, the passing of a cup of hot coffee takes on an almost liturgical significance that emotionally bonds the refugees. Theo, in seeking solitude, wants only to continue with his old life as if nothing had happened. He believes that if he can just get back in time to register for the fall semester, things will return to normal. His most inexpressible thought becomes crystallized during the journey as he interprets his mother's love of churches and Bach as a need to convert to Christianity. He finally verbalizes this intention to the survivors and they are appalled and frightened. Their stories slowly and deliberately bring him to a realization that he must change his life, not his religion.

Theo Braun's attempt to return home evolves metaphorically as a journey of self-discovery both for himself and for the Jewish people, as Appelfeld depicts Theo and the other survivors slowly regaining their voices. At first, their encounters are halting; emotions and even simple words come with great difficulty. "His few words went mute within him." As the survivors discover their voices, they begin to show their concern for one another.

The novel focuses upon language, as there is shown a special reverence for the "language of the camps," Yiddish. Appelfeld assigns it a mythical origin. "A person has to get supplies. The crows won't feed you. She spoke guttural Yiddish, made of the spirits of this place. He understood her." At

work's end, Theo is determined no longer to speak German. All of his life his parents had concerned themselves with proper German grammar and inflection.

That language which his mother had inculcated in him with such love would be lost forever. If he spoke, he would speak only in the language of the camps.

With the realization that his home is now only part of a past that no longer exists — an illusionary past built upon a culture that responded to his parents' devotion with disdainful violence — Theo is then converted by the refugees' pleas, not to Christianity, but to the newly regained humanism of the survivors.

There are some weak people among us whom we mustn't abandon now. We haven't lost the semblance of humanity. We must do what is incumbent upon us. . . . I am not a religious man, and I shall probably never be one, but I feel that if we don't stretch out our hands, we are like murderers.

Theo comes to realize that he must now live for ideals that comprise the communal good. He is slowly converted to a strong, humanistic ethic: the code of *mentchlekhkeit*.

Among us are martyrs for the sake of man. That mute man there, sitting at my side, used to give his meager crust to two sick people. . . . So why are you running away from us? We mustn't run away and leave behind the sick and weak. You should take one of the sick people and bring him to a safe place. We aren't like the murderers.

This quasi-allegorical tale of Theo's rebirth can be viewed symbolically as one man's return to *Knesset Israel*, the mystical community of the house of Israel. The redemptive process of the Lurianic

concept of *tikkun* is narratively portrayed as the survivors are gathered up like so many "divine sparks" scattered across a foreign landscape.

For Every Sin is masterfully conceived by Appelfeld, and its rich symbolism will surely generate much critical attention and interpretation. In his choice of the nominally symbolic name Theo, Greek for God, he may be alluding to a vision of the deity's return to a post-Holocaust world or presenting a Beckettesque drama of men and women teaching God human compassion. It is eventually left to each reader to place her or his experiences into the narrative flow. Appelfeld's text invites strong reader participation, for he constructs purposefully vague, allegorical fragments. His work is laden with quasi-religious motifs and biblical correspondences. One powerful image portrays a survivor aiding a man whom Theo has inadvertently injured. "A woman knelt next to the fallen man and placed a cloth on his face. The cloth absorbed the blood and turned red."

The work also deals strongly with the issue of religion, as embodied in the character of Mendel Dorf, Theo's bunkmate. Mendel's religiosity and heroic compassion were distrusted by the people of the camps.

They couldn't accept his sincerity, seeing only hypocrisy. They refused to see free will in his actions. Moreover, they were sure that he only did what he did to buy their hearts . . . He was religious, and because of his faith he suffered greatly. The other slave laborers didn't like the way he got up early, didn't like his prayers and benedictions. Even though his prayers were entirely inconspicuous, they made people angry at him. "Don't pray, don't recite blessings," they would hiss at him, as though he

were doing something shameful in public.

He possessed a simple devotion to prayer and is met only with intolerance. "For shame. That isn't Jewish behavior."

Throughout the novel, Appelfeld has portrayed most of the survivors whose lives converge with Theo's to be assimilated and non-observant. However, their sense of community and their acts of humanism are shown to be as commendable and heroic as those of Dorf. At work's end, the figure of Mendel Dorf becomes one with his religion as he is now, in a sense, apotheosized.

With great clarity he saw Mendel Dorf, wrapped in a prayer shawl, wearing phylacteries, standing motionless, as though the prayer had mummified him. "Mendel," he wanted to call to him, "why are you turning your back on me?" But he immediately understood that Mendel could no longer move. He and his prayer had become one. From then on no one would harm him.

Appelfeld's narrative presents the evolution of post-Holocaust thinking and, in the process, conveys an impassioned Zionist rationale. As Theo aids a fellow survivor he, too, begins to regain his humanity and sense of community. From deep within him, almost subconsciously, "stirred up a confused stream of words." The use of the term "confused stream of words" is laden with authorial irony, for it is here that Appelfeld's message is most forcefully and directly conveyed.

He spoke of the need to live a full and proud life. A person who doesn't live a full and proud life is like an insect. The Jews had never taught their children how to live, to struggle, to demand their due; in times of need, to unsheathe the sword and stand face to face against evil. The

wicked had to know that people weren't afraid either of cold or of death. They had the courage to stand fast and not fear.

In this novel Appelfeld's own voice is strongly felt, as the work's underpinnings speak of a need for community — an implied reference to the state of Israel, a need to recognize that Jews, both secular and observant, be a respected part of that community and, above all, that that community be based on humanistic compassion. In essence, the book draws upon his own assimilated family's experience in Czernowitz, his escape from a Ukrainian labor camp, his three years of living in the Russian forests, his ideals as a Labor Zionist,

and his long, thoughtful years of teaching literature and Holocaust studies at Ben-Gurion University. He tells Haim Chertok in *We Are All Close*, "A language to deal with the immensity of the events must be found or created — one neither too emotional nor too rational." As the readers of *For Every Sin* will attest, Appelfeld has found such a voice. In the process, he has created a powerful and thought provoking, existential drama that, at every level, is richly conceived and elegantly written. This novel, Aharon Appelfeld's seventh to appear in English, again shows him to be one of the world's most consistent and important writers of contemporary fiction.

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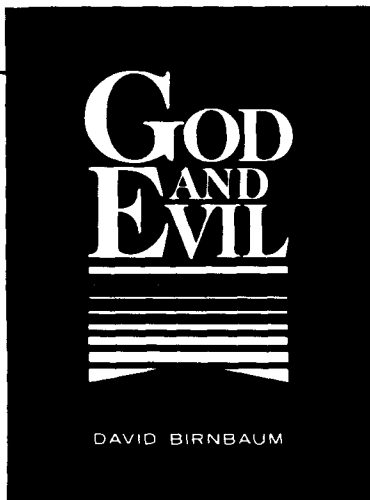
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